




MIRACLES

By THOMAS J. DODD, D. D.

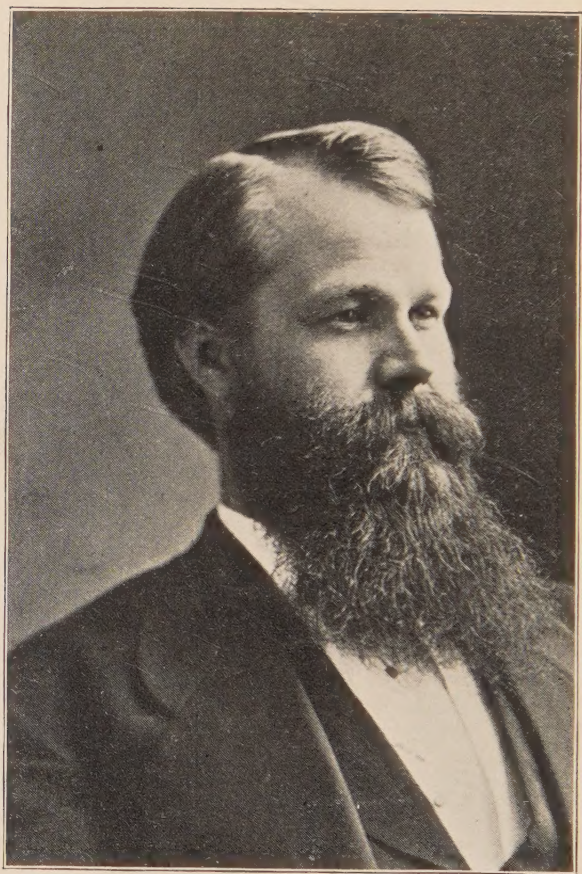
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THOMAS J. DODD, D. D.

MIRACLES: Were They, or Were They Not, Performed by Jesus?

A QUESTION OF FACT, NOT
OF SCIENCE OR THEOLOGY

“The question as to what Jesus actually said and did is capable of solution by no other methods than those ordinarily practiced by the historian and literary critic.”—*Prof. Huxley.*

By THOMAS J. DODD, D. D.



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Preface

WHILE we shall endeavor to make our argument sufficiently concise, we shall yet make it as comprehensive as the limits we have allowed the subject can permit. We shall, therefore, along with the other miracles of Jesus, include the great, final miracle of his resurrection from the dead. But neither as to this, nor any of the other miracles, shall we attempt a distinct specific argument. We assert the general proposition that miracles were wrought by Jesus, and we hope to show that the proof of this afforded by the Gospels is, in all regards, of the most convincing nature, and able to endure the severest tests to which the most critical investigation can subject it.

We can not hope, however, that all who read the argument shall be convinced. Mere argument rarely convinces those of adverse views, especially when with those views the holders of them are content; and more especially still, when such views have been founded

upon prepossessions or assumptions which have been permitted to usurp in the mind the place of great fundamental principles of belief. When one lays down the arbitrary dictum, as Rénan has done, that "supernatural relations are not to be accepted as such,"¹ or with Büchner asserts the "natural impossibility of a miracle," or like Strauss, can speak of belief in miracles as "debasing to the reason,"² he virtually announces a determined adherence to his views, and that no amount or kind of evidence shall affect his disbelief.

And there are others whom the argument can not reach. There can be no argument for miracles, either with the man who denies the being of a God, or with him who regards the Sacred Scriptures as a mere tissue of falsehood or fable. With such a one the foundation can not be laid upon which to rear an argument. To reason with such a one as to deeds which Omnipotence alone could have accomplished, or as to facts of the past for which no historical basis is allowed, were as absurd as had been

¹Life of Jesus, p. 45.

²New Life of Jesus, p. II.

the effort to move the world without the *Dos Pou Sto* from which to ply the lever.

There are those, however, that reject the miracles whose minds are yet open to conviction. Some of these, fully persuaded of the great fundamental truths of the Christian religion, are the sincere followers of Jesus, notwithstanding the miracles have been to them a hindrance rather than an aid to faith; while others, failing to distinguish between these fundamental truths and each particular kind of evidence by which these truths have been established, have so associated the miracles with the redemptive work of Jesus that in the rejection of the former they have, as if bound by an invincible necessity, rejected the latter likewise. Such persons are, therefore, disbelievers of the gospel more through an error in their logic, than from any hostile attitude either to the person or to the work of Jesus.

Both of these classes would believe were the evidence properly set before them. They are not wedded to their unbelief; they make no effort to resist conviction; and in many cases would readily yield to any argument that af-

fords a satisfactory basis for their adoption of the commonly-accepted faith. To unbelievers such as these, and to all whose minds are sufficiently free from prejudice or other fetters to weigh the evidence aright, the following pages have been addressed. It is hoped that the argument may contribute something toward bringing the lovers of the truth into closer fellowship of thought and faith upon the subject, and the author would be profoundly grateful should it substitute belief for unbelief in a single mind that struggles with its doubts.

Such quotations as the reader may desire to verify are taken from the following editions of the works referred to:

Huxley's "Essays on Some Controverted Questions," 1892.

Huxley's "Essays on Christianity and Agnosticism," New York, 1889.

Strauss's "New Faith and Old," New York, 1873.

Strauss's "New Life of Jesus," London, 1865.

Mill's "Three Essays in Religion," New York, 1874.

Rénan's "Life of Jesus," New York, 1864.

Rénan's "Life of Jesus," Thirteenth Edition, Paris, 1867.

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Hume's "Essays," Edinburgh, 1800.

Rousseau's "Emile," Paris, 1851.

Bayle's "Historical and Critical Dictionary," London, 1734.

Ockley's "History of the Saracens," Cambridge, 1757.

Büchner's "Force and Matter," London, 1870.

Paley's Works, London, 1817.

Duke of Argyll's "Reign of Law," New York, 1869.

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MIRACLES

CHAPTER I

Statement of the Question and the Evidence

THERE can be no belief in miracles without belief in God, and no belief in the miracles of Jesus without admission of the general credibility of the records of the life of Jesus. The reader is, therefore, assumed to be a believer in God, and the Gospels are assumed to be, in the main, of at least equal authority with other ancient historical narratives. No claim is made, however, for the Divine origin or the infallible verity of these writings. Our effort shall be, independently of any Divine authority in the Gospels, to show that the evidence which they afford of the miracles of Jesus is such that to doubt or disbelieve these miracles is in the highest degree unreasonable, if not absurd.

We attempt no definition of the miracles; and we offer no theory as to their relations to law or nature. There is no need of this. We view the miracles merely as so many events in the life of Jesus, differing from other historical events solely in being of a most extraordinary nature, and in being rendered credible only by evidence of the most trustworthy and unexceptionable character. Considered thus, much that might otherwise be said upon the subject is omitted here. We enter upon no discussion of the moral or theological bearings of the question, and except so far as may be necessary in the answering of objections, we shall have but little to say of "law," "order," or "course of nature." We shall avoid, so far as possible, all terms or phrases involving theories as distinguished from the facts of miracles, and address ourselves to the simple question, Did Jesus do the deeds called miracles, of which the Gospels tell us? a mere question of fact of the very same nature with, Was Jesus born in Bethlehem? or, Was he slain on Calvary?

In thus reviewing miracles in their own

light, as simple facts in history, we rid ourselves at the outset of many difficulties which must otherwise beset the subject. Especially do we free ourselves from fear of the conflict with physical science. Whatever science may do with questions of the "natural" or "supernatural," she can never disprove as facts these mighty works of Jesus. Antecedently to announcement of what appears to contradict the established truths of science, the latter may raise her voice and declare that whatever shall thus truly contradict can not be believed; but announcement of the fact once made, science has nothing to do, if she would be consistent with herself, but to examine the proof, and accept or reject according to the evidence presented. It is thus, and thus only, that science has made her advances in the past; thus only can she make advancement in the future. What would be the case if a number of men, or even a single individual of established credit, should announce that he had discovered a new world of extraordinary brilliancy, nearer the sun than ourselves, and that upon calculation he had ascertained that it would be

seen again at or near a given time? The mere sciolist might declare the thing to be impossible, and dismiss the subject; but the scientist, seeking truth and open to conviction of the truth, would wait until the time comes round, and would then direct his instrument and make investigation. In case the planet were not seen, he would, if he had it on good authority that it had been seen by others, conclude that the error had been his own, and would wait again for opportunity to renew his observations. Convinced at last that the new world really existed, he would have little or nothing to say of law, order, or irregularity, further than that his own and others' notions of these things had been erroneous. "This new world," he would doubtless say, "breaks in upon our old ideas of things—breaks in upon gravitation and the 'order' of the universe; but 'order' and 'gravitation,' as we have understood the terms, must be submitted to new investigations. Order or no order, the thing is a fact, and it must be believed."

Now, what we call the miracles of Jesus are so many alleged facts, which *as facts* must be

considered regardless of all theories of law or nature. Shall we reject the miracles because some may interpose, and say that miracles are impossible, being inconsistent with the reign of law, at variance with the order and harmony of the physical universe? If it can be shown that no such things have *ever* taken place, we may reasonably exclaim, "No wonder, for these things are contradictions of what we know of natural laws;" but all such declarations prior to the investigation of the facts themselves, and made in order to prove that the facts did not occur, are but bold assumptions of the point discussed, and in any other sphere of thought than that which opposes religion the absurdity of such reasoning would be most glaring.

But where did we get this idea of miracles being inconsistent with law in nature? Certainly not from science. Science can no more define a miracle than she can define eternity or God; and the Bible gives us no idea of what a miracle is, other than that it is "a sign," or "wonder," or "mighty deed;" sign, if you please, of a power and wisdom not possessed

by man; sign of a higher power brought to bear upon the ordinary line of cause and effect in the physical world. The value of miracle as evidence consists in its implying control of nature not possible to man, or results worked out by processes not within the reach of man. But this neither implies the violation, nor excludes the operation, of nature's laws. The miracles themselves may have been wholly within the order of nature, while the power that produced them was altogether out of and beyond that order. It is not the supernatural element in the miracle, but the super-human power of the performer, that gives it weight as evidence of the Divine mission of Jesus. If Jesus, therefore, wrought his miracles by controlling the laws of nature so as to make them effect results impossible to their ordinary operations and beyond the skill of man, the miracles were as really signs, such as they were intended to be, as if every law of the universe had been violated or suspended.

To maintain that the miracles were not wrought through natural law, is to assume that we know something of the way in which

they were performed, and that we know, besides, all the laws of the universe, and all the operations which can be accomplished by them. Any impossibility which the Christian believer may here assert is equally unscientific and equally dishonoring to God, with the oppositions of those who reject the miracles. Neither believer nor disbeliever is authorized to assert that miracles are violations of the laws of nature. If nature herself produces phenomena by combination or adjustment of her laws, and if man can, by the same processes, work out results that apparently violate or contradict all known laws, certainly Jesus, whether he was the Mighty God himself, or only an ambassador endowed with Divine power and wisdom, could have done the same.

We would not be understood as saying that it was thus that Jesus wrought his miracles. We do not know; and this—that we do not know—is about all that we do know as to the way in which his miracles were performed. All that we can safely assert is, that the acts ascribed to Jesus under the name of miracles,

whether achieved by Divine or other super-human power, whether by processes of natural law, or by means altogether supernatural, were not in the line of ordinary nature. That they were *extra*-ordinary, in the true sense of the word, is all that we can properly claim for them in any discussion of the evidences by which they are to be established.

In determining, therefore, the question whether or not these works of Jesus were really performed, it is in the light of history merely, not of science or theology, that the subject is to be considered; and the question must be settled in the very same way in which we decide upon other events in history; that is, by appeal to the records of the past.

Of this last assertion, however, a most important qualification must be made. While it is by the testimony of history alone that the miracles are to be established, the testimony must be far superior to that upon which other events in history have generally been admitted. Where the events narrated involve matters of faith and conscience, or are of such a marvelous character—so variant with the

course of nature and the general experience of mankind—as were those wonderful deeds of Jesus, they can not be admitted upon such evidence as satisfies us as to the exploits of a Cæsar, an Alexander, or a Genghis Khan. The mere statements of accredited historians can not be admitted here, not necessarily even when they are re-enforced by the authorities from which they have been derived. There must be an unbroken succession of authorities back to the dates of the deeds in question, and then these deeds must be attested by those who had personal knowledge of them, and who gave their testimony in circumstances which forbid all reasonable imputation to them of any kind of fraud, or even of all kinds of self-deception or delusion.

The testimony must have been given at such times and places as afforded ample opportunity for investigation, and the facts themselves must have been of a nature to be cognized by the senses. No mere mental phenomenon, no belief, theory, or doctrine, can be the subject of testimony. The miracles must have been discernible by the senses, and

at the same time they must not have transcended or contradicted the senses. The deeds themselves should have been seen, and the performers of them seen; and that which was performed is required to have been consistent with what observation in the ordinary exercise of our faculties tells us is really true.

Such a miracle, therefore, as is claimed by some in the transubstantiation of the mass, can not be considered here. The eye does not discern the miracle. The performer of the miracle is not seen. So far as the senses testify, the bread is still bread, and the wine is wine, notwithstanding the consecration. The miracle cotradsicts, and can not, therefore, be attested by the senses.

Not only must the testimony when delivered have been admitted by those who had opportunity of putting it to the test, but the admission must have been general; that is, limited to no particular class or party of observers. It must have been admitted by the adherents of all creeds, in both political and religious faith, and by the enemies as well as

the friends of the witnesses and of him whose cause these latter had espoused.

To the above, and perhaps other tests, the critical inquirer may subject the evidence for miracles, and he should not be regarded unreasonable or unduly prejudiced, so long as in his examinations he confines himself to the methods of legitimate historical investigation.

There are bounds, however, which the inquirer not unfrequently transcends, and some of these may now be named. The arbitrary rejection, without examination, of the evidence; the effort to make the peculiar nature of the facts a proof that the facts did not occur; the rejection of the miracles because they lie beyond the range of one's own, or of the general observation of mankind; the charging of such numbers of witnesses with moral or intellectual infirmity, when no other ground can be found for this than the difficulty of admitting what they witness to; the assumption that miracles are violations of the laws of nature, when no man knows enough of any of these laws to say whether in any given case

there has been a violation; asserting the impossibility of a miracle while yet admitting the being of a God, or running the difficulty of believing in miracles into an assertion of their inherent incredibility, as if this belief were contradictory of the laws of thought or reason,—these and other like objections to the miracles are not according to the methods of the true historian; for these demand that, first of all, the evidence be considered, and if this be unimpeachable, the miracles are to be admitted, unless it can be shown either that the miracles, like creeds or dogmas, lie beyond the sphere of human testimony, or that Omnipotence itself can not work a miracle.

Let us now see what is the evidence to which appeal is made in proof of those wonderful works of Jesus.

The multitudes that followed Jesus bore witness to the miracles; the Jewish high priests made open confession of them; Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, added his testimony; Paul, with Thomas and the other apostles, testified to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and this, with many other of the

miracles, was particularly described by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; while Jesus himself asserted miracles as the credentials of his Divine mission to the world, and, without reserve or fear, told the multitudes of both friends and enemies not to receive him unless they saw the miracles performed.

For greater convenience of reference, we give the miracles in the order in which they occur in the Gospels. Their true chronological order is not necessary to the argument.

The miracles, more or less minutely described, are:

Peter's mother-in-law healed. (Matthew viii, 14.)

The calming of the storm. (Matthew viii, 24.)

The devils driven into the swine. (Matthew viii, 28.)

Sight given to the blind. (Matthew ix, 27.)

A demoniac restored. (Matthew ix, 32.)

Christ walking on the water. (Matthew xiv, 25.)

The Syrophenician maiden healed. (Matthew xv, 22.)

Feeding of a multitude. (Matthew xv, 32.)

Money in the fish's mouth. (Matthew xvii, 24.)

Sight given to the blind. (Matthew xx, 29.)

The fig-tree withered. (Matthew xxi, 18.)

A demoniac restored. (Mark i, 23.)

A leper cleansed. (Mark i, 40.)

A withered hand restored. (Mark iii, 21.)

Blind, dumb demoniac restored. (Mark iii, 19.)

Resuscitation of Jairus's daughter. (Mark v, 22.)

Woman with the issue of blood. (Mark v, 25.)
Feeding of the multitude. (Mark vi, 34.)
Deaf stammerer cured. (Mark vii, 31.)
Sight given to the blind. (Mark viii, 22.)
A demoniac restored. (Mark ix, 14.)
The draught of fish. (Luke v, 1.)
A paralytic healed. (Luke v, 17.)
Centurion's servant healed. (Luke vii, 1.)
Raising of the widow's son. (Luke vii, 11.)
Spinal curvature healed. (Luke xiii, 10.)
Healing of the dropsy. (Luke xiv, 2.)
The cut-off ear restored. (Luke xxii, 49.)
Water turned into wine. (John ii, 1.)
Nobleman's son healed. (John iv, 26.)
The cripple at Bethesda. (John v, 1.)
Sight given to a man born blind. (John ix, 1.)
Resurrection of Lazarus. (John xi, 1.)
Resurrection of Jesus. (Matthew xxviii, 7; Mark
xvi, 9, etc.)

More general statements as to the miracles
are as follows:

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching
in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel
of the kingdom, and healing all manner of
sickness and all manner of disease among the
people. And his fame went throughout all
Syria: and they brought unto him all sick peo-
ple that were taken with divers diseases and
torments, and those which were lunatic, and
those that had the palsy; and he healed
them."—Matthew iv, 23.

“The men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”—Matthew viii, 27.

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do see and hear: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up.”—Matthew xi, 4.

“And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them.”—Matthew xv, 30.

“And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea, beyond Jordan; and great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.”—Matthew xix, 1.

“And the blind and the lame came to him in the Temple; and he healed them.”—Matthew xxi, 14.

“And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the un-

clean spirits, and they do obey him.”—Mark i, 27.

“And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils.”—Mark i, 32.

“And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.”—Mark vi, 56.

“And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”—Mark vii, 37.

“And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! For with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.”—Luke iv, 36.

“Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.”—Luke iv, 40.

“And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.”—Luke v, 17.

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and his disciples believed on him.”—John ii, 11.

“Nicodemus . . . said unto him, . . . We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”—John iii, 1, 2.

“I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.”—John v, 36.

“And a great multitude followed him, because they saw the miracles which he did.”—John vi, 2.

“The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bare witness of me.”—John x, 25.

“If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know,

and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.”—John x, 37, 38.

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.”—John xi, 47.

“The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.”—John xii, 17.

“Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God . . . by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”—Acts ii, 22.

We have the following accounts of the resurrection of Jesus:

“Go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him. . . . And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshiped him.”—Matthew xxviii, 7.

“Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. And after that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.”—Mark xvi, 9.

“Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken he showed them his hands and his feet.”—Luke xxiv, 36.

“Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.”—John xx, 20.

“But Thomas, one of the Twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto

him, We have seen the Lord. But he saith unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."—John xx, 24.

"To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."—Acts i, 3.

'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.'—Acts ii, 23.

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."—Acts ii, 32.

“I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve: and after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”—Paul, in 1 Corinthians xv, 3.

Such is the evidence proposed of the miracles and resurrection of Jesus, the testimony of living witnesses, all of whom, with the exception of the Apostle Paul, were either the daily companions of Jesus, or the occasional attendants upon his ministry, or, as in the case of Luke, had gotten their information from “eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word.”

It will doubtless be conceded that this evidence *in itself* is all that could be desired. Nothing could be stated more clearly or more definitely than that the miracles were per-

formed, and that Jesus rose from the dead: and the most determined skeptic could not demand that the evidence should be more abundant.

We must now consider the sources from which we get this evidence,—four little books which have been ascribed to the writers already named, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, together with occasional statements in the Acts of the Apostles and in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

There can be no objection to our omitting discussion of the dates and authorship of these writings, provided we claim no more than has been admitted by those who oppose the miracles. For sake of the argument, we are willing to let Rénan describe these points.

By Rénan, *Luke* is said to have composed his Gospel soon after the siege of Jerusalem, which occurred in A. D. 70. The Gospel itself is spoken of as “a work written entirely by the same hand, and of the most perfect unity”—the work of a man who “selects, prunes, combines.”¹ *Matthew* he places at an earlier date,

¹Life of Jesus, pp. 18, 19.

and *Mark* even before *Matthew*,² and after expressing the opinion that both these Gospels had received additions from earlier sources, he speaks of them as bearing "not wrongfully the name of 'Gospel According to Matthew,' and 'Gospel According to Mark.'" "Matthew clearly deserves unlimited confidence as regards the discourses."⁴ "Mark, the interpreter of Peter," gives us "narratives and sayings, composed from the accounts and reminiscences of the Apostle Peter,"⁵ and "is full of minute observations coming without any doubt from an eye-witness."⁶

John's Gospel is placed "towards the close of the first century."⁷ Our critic says that its worthiness, of "high consideration and often of preference, is demonstrated, both by the internal evidence and by the examination of the document itself, in a manner that leaves nothing to be desired."⁸ Comparing the works of the three Synoptists,⁹ Matthew, Mark, Luke,

²Life of Jesus, pp. 19, 35. ³Ibid. p. 22. ⁴Ibid. p. 34.

⁵Ibid. p. 20. ⁶Ibid. p. 35. ⁷Ibid. p. 25. ⁸Ibid. p. 25.

⁹Dr. Schaff calls attention to the fact that this is the proper form of the word in *English*: *Synoptic* is the adjective, or the *German* noun.—*Church History, Vol. I.*

to the *Memorabilia of Socrates*, by Xenophon, and the Gospel of John to the "Dialogues of Plato," and giving preference to the former as expositions of the "Socratic Teaching," he calls the author of the Fourth Gospel "the better biographer" of Jesus, because just as Plato "knew most important things in regard to the life of Socrates, of which Xenophon was entirely ignorant," so the fourth evangelist "was better acquainted with the external circumstances of the life" of Jesus than were those "whose memories made up the Synoptic Gospels."¹⁰

"Upon the whole," says Rénan, "I accept the four Canonical Gospels as authentic. All, in my judgment, date back to the first century, and they are substantially by the authors to whom they are attributed."¹¹

Not that we indorse everything here said, do we quote thus freely from the *Vie de Jesus*: we quote merely to give the other side of this question the benefit of its own teachings as to the matters of date and authorship.

With Rénan, therefore, as our authority,

¹⁰ *Life of Jesus*, p. 33. ¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 34.

we assign Mark's Gospel to a date not far from the middle of the first century; Matthew and Luke somewhat later, with John about the year A. D. 90—"all of them authentic," and each of them having its own peculiar excellences and special claim upon the respectful consideration of the reader.

If the above dates are accurate, or proximately so, better times could not have been selected for the composition of the Gospels—better, that is, for faithful, discriminating histories of the life of Jesus. The histories were thus written at sufficient remoteness from the events narrated to enable the writers to digest both their own personal recollections and the accounts which, from other sources, may have been put into circulation among the people; and yet not time enough had elapsed to dim the memory or otherwise distort the picture which had been retained of Jesus and his mighty works, or, in the language of Rénan, "the excellence of the Master, his miracles, and his teachings."¹² Nor had the generations

¹² *Life of Jesus*, p. 39.

passed away which might have critically decided upon the merits of these writings.

These are facts which indicate that, not only were the original authors of the Gospels careful in their work of composition or selection, but that the most critical caution was observed on the part of those who subsequently adopted these works into the Sacred Canon. Just as the disciples selected from among themselves to take the place of Judas,¹³ only one who had been both their own and Jesus' associate from the beginning of his ministry to his resurrection from the dead, and one, therefore, like themselves an eye-witness both of the other miracles and of the resurrection, so in their narratives of the life of Jesus the successors of these disciples were cautious to select for publication to the world and to future ages only those reminiscences or traditions in the compilation of which there could be least room for error, and as to the truth of which there could be least occasion for disbelief or doubt. Out of a number of histories or memorabilia of Jesus they selected only

¹³ Acts i, 22.

those of the four evangelists of whom John and Matthew had been the daily companions of Jesus; Luke had carefully "traced all things from the first," following the accounts only of "eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word,"¹⁴ and Mark had written as the amanuensis of the Apostle Peter. Of these writers, therefore, it may be said that they give us substantially only the testimony of eye-witnesses to the events recorded. And this fact must now be emphasized, that among all the distinguished characters of ancient times we can find none whose life may be regarded as so carefully or so accurately given as is that of Jesus.

We say these Gospels were selected from a number of memoirs known to the early Church. That other narratives of the life of Jesus were in existence before the formation of the Sacred Canon is a fact well known; and some of these were in almost equal esteem with the other parts of Scripture. The "Acts of Pilate," for instance, is appealed to by both Tertullian and Justin Martyr, the latter of

¹⁴ Luke i, 1, 2.

whom tells us that these Acts "were recorded under Pontius Pilate."¹⁵ So early a writer as Origen cites "The Gospel According to the Egyptians," the "Gospel According to the Hebrews," the "Gospel of Matthias," the "Gospel of Peter," with several others of like character; and by the time the Canon was arranged, more than one hundred of the Apocryphal writings, counting "Acts" and "Epistles" as well as "Gospels," were noticed by the "Fathers," near one-half of which are still extant.¹⁶

But there is good evidence that many works of this kind had been written before our Gospels were composed.

1. Quotations are found in the "Fathers," of sayings of Jesus, which are not given in our Gospels, and these sayings, if not mere loose, unwritten tradition, must have been extracted from books not now known to the world. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," is an

¹⁵ Justin Martyr: "First Apology," page 28. Oxford, 1861.

¹⁶ McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia: Art. "Apocrypha," where a complete list of these writings is given.

instance in kind, given by Paul himself,¹⁷ and the apostle's caution to Timothy against giving heed to "*myths* and endless genealogies"¹⁸ looks very much like a reference to writings concerning Jesus which he regarded mythical.

2. St. Paul again, in his famous chapter on the resurrection,¹⁹ cites "Scriptures" which narrated the rising of Jesus from the dead. These Scriptures could not have been any of those now called Gospels; for (1) the account there given was, in several particulars, different from any now known to us, and (2) if the generally accepted chronology be correct, the Epistle to the Corinthians was written several years before the earliest of our Gospels was published to the world. The dates of these Gospels, according to Rénan, have already been given to the reader. According to Dr. Schaff, a more recent, and, to many, a more acceptable authority than Rénan, all these Gospels belong to the "seventh decade;" that is, between 60 A. D. and 70 A. D., while this Epistle was composed A. D. 57.²⁰

¹⁷ Acts xx, 35. ¹⁸ 1 Tim. i, 4. ¹⁹ 1 Cor. xv.

²⁰ History of the Church, Vol. I, pages 582, 758.

3. Besides this evidence from Paul, we have the express testimony of Luke that before his Gospel was undertaken, "many had taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which were surely believed"²¹ among the followers of Jesus.

Now, the fact that from so many writings only four small volumes, of a few hours' reading each, should have been authorized as containing the true life of Jesus, and that these four should so fully agree in all the essential features of that life, is evidence that can not be disregarded, that the Gospels, as we now have them, were compiled with the greatest possible care, and were sanctioned by the Church only after thorough investigation of their contents.

But with all this evidence of painstaking accuracy in the compilation of these writings, there are striking peculiarities of an apparently opposite kind which must not be passed in silence. We observe, for instance, an almost total disregard of many of the most important principles of historical composition. There is

²¹ Luke i, i.

no proper observance of proportion as regards the prominence of the events narrated; both deeds and discourses are given out of their true order or connections; liberties, in the quotations from the Old Testament, are taken with the text, which modern usage could not permit; there is total absence of effort to adorn or amplify, or even to set in their true light, many of the most interesting portions of the history; the most wonderful, and, apparently, the most trivial incidents are described in the same plain, matter-of-fact style, and with equal length or brevity of description; facts are related by each with seeming unconcern as to whether, in the particular incidents, his own account agrees or not with the accounts of his fellow disciples,—and all this with a want of chronological precision and biographical completeness which would be fatal to other historical compositions.

But what is most remarkable in these defects or blemishes, if such they be, we see only proof of the value of these writings, when they are considered—as in the present discussion they should be—merely as the sources or

authorities of our knowledge of the acts and sayings of Jesus. The disagreement as to incidents only makes more manifest the agreement as to the main facts presented. Professor Huxley's glorying is vain, as he discovers the discrepancy in the accounts of the Gadarene miracle as to the number of men possessed of evil spirits,²² for the writers all agree in the expulsion of the demons into the swine, which Professor Huxley himself confesses to be the "essential point."²³ As here, so throughout these books discrepancies are such as must inevitably exist in four different recitals made by as many different men on different occasions, and they only afford the stronger evidence that each man presented the truth of things as his own eyes had seen them, and the disagreements in non-essentials set before us in better light, and better proven, the essential facts in Jesus' life.

So of other objections made by some as to the style of these biographies. The want of arrangement so conspicuous, the lack of rhe-

²² Cf. Matt. viii, 28, with Mark v, 2, and Luke viii, 27.

²³ Christianity and Agnosticism, page 20.

torical effort, the easy, natural manner of narrating the mighty deeds, the absence of appeal to the reader's sense of the marvelous, the unconcern apparent at least as to the reader's acceptance or rejection of the narratives,—all these, along with the direct, clear, bold, unadorned statement of facts, without equivocation, self-contradiction, or concealment, make these Gospels appear to be the work of honest, simple-minded men, whose only purpose was the transmission to posterity and throughout the world of the main deeds and teachings of their Master.

Taken all in all, therefore, these peculiarities add greatly to the *prima facie* credibility of the Gospel histories. They sink the authors into obscurity, they bring out their subject into the bolder relief, and present us Jesus the more fully as a real, living being, moving, speaking, acting before our eyes.

All this has been fully admitted by the ablest opposers of the miracles. More than a century ago Rousseau declared that "the life and sayings of Socrates were not nearly so

well attested as those of Jesus;”²⁴ and recently *John Stuart Mill*: “It is useless to say that the Christ of the Gospels is not historical: his character will abide after criticism has done its utmost.”²⁵ *Strauss* speaks of the first three Gospels as “the reminiscences of the very man, gathered and garnered on the very spot;”²⁶ while *Rénan*, as we have seen, says that they are “all authentic,” and elsewhere speaks of them “as better than formal, authoritative history.” Matthew “clearly deserves unlimited confidence as regards the discourses;”²⁷ Mark presents us both “the narratives and sayings ‘of Jesus’ full of minute observations coming without any doubt from an eye-witness;” Luke is an author who “selects, prunes, combines,” while John is even “a better biographer” than either of these, inasmuch as he “was better acquainted with the external circumstances of the life of Jesus.”

It is thus seen that, whatever their idea of the miracles, the best known and most fre-

²⁴ *Emile*, p. 370.

²⁵ *Three Essays in Religion*, p. 353.

²⁶ *Old Faith and New*, p. 57. ²⁷ *Life of Jesus*, p. 34

quently read among the authors who deny the miracles give unequivocal testimony to the writings in which the miracles have been narrated. This testimony is virtually given to the miracles themselves, and but for the general character of the works from which the above quotations have been made, the authors of them might be understood as here contradicting their own denials of the miracles. Of course, however, we can not urge this point. All that we now claim is the full admission of the high character of the sources from which we derive our evidence of the miracles, and consequently the no less full admission of the evidence as we propose to present it in the argument.

The testimony being admitted as part of the written life of Jesus, we can not see how the miracles can be denied as part of the actual life. These are so inwoven with the general text of the Gospels that to eliminate them would be such a disintegration of the records as no just criticism could allow; to believe them legendary or fabulous would be to throw discredit upon the history from first to last.

There might be reasons for expunging here and there the record of some particular deed, just as one might challenge the authenticity of certain passages in Thucydides or Xenophon; but to assert that the main story of the Gospels is veritable history, while all accounts of miracles are false, is equally absurd with admitting the works of Thucydides and Xenophon to be genuine histories, and yet all accounts of battles in the one, or of stathmi and parasangs in the other, are to be discarded.

CHAPTER II

Further Consideration of the Evidence

SO much, in brief, for the writings which contain the evidence. The authors of these writings, it must be borne in mind, while bearing testimony of their own, have recorded that of large numbers of others whose evidence is equally valid and equally trustworthy.

Long before the evangelists had composed their histories, the apostles, other disciples, the mixed multitudes of followers, Jesus himself, and the Jewish Sanhedrim had testified to the miracles. The testimony of these is none the less valid because they had not themselves set it down on parchment. They had given their evidence in person, with the living voice, and many of them were yet alive when the evidence was published to the world.

Let us now see more particularly who these other witnesses are.

As to the unnamed multitudes that witnessed to the miracles, we can only take it for

granted that they were men and women of the average intellectual and moral character. To suppose otherwise would be in violation of all probability, and would evince an unfair spirit in the argument. The testimony of these multitudes is all that could be desired. "What manner of man is this, that the winds and seas obey him?"¹

"With authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."² "He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."³

But who were the scribes and Pharisees that testified? We know them well. No class of men in history is better known—known as men of the most bigoted sectarian zeal; devoted to tradition; opposed to all innovation that might contradict their usages or their ideas; servants of the letter rather than the spirit of the truth; bitter enemies of Jesus, and very naturally so, for at their errors, their blind follies, and hoary superstitions, Jesus had, from the first, been leveling his severest denunciations. It was these men, chiefly, that

¹ Matt. viii, 27.

² Luke iv, 36.

³ Mark vii, 37.

persecuted Jesus, thwarted him at every step, and at length when they could not otherwise prevail, nailed him to the cross. These men, with all their hate, prejudice, malice, bore witness to the miracles. "This man doeth many miracles. If we let him alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."⁴

Of the disciples who testified we know this: whatever may have been their faults, their want of intellectual or social culture, or other defects of character, they were men of strong, determined will; men who, as they could not be forced into recanting what they had said, and believed that they had seen, so neither were they likely to be persuaded or deluded into believing as seen that which they had not seen. They were not weak, silly men, such as easily believe the marvelous merely because or when it supports their own views or interests. On the other hand, they were eminently skeptical men; they were the first to doubt the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; they contemptuously jeered at the re-

⁴John xi, 47, 48.

port of Mary,⁵ and in no one instance did they credit each other's testimony on the subject. They must see, each with his own eyes, and even then they did not believe until they had taken hold of the body and satisfied themselves by the double evidence of sight and touch that the apparition before them was really Jesus.⁶ These men were heroes in the cause for which they labored. In strength of soul and in hazardous achievement they stand alone in history. They went forth, friendless and unaided, in the midst of opposition, scorn, persecution, and dangers of death, to establish throughout the world what was apparently the most absolutely hopeless enterprise ever conceived by man; and they did establish it; in the words of their enemies, they "turned the world upside down,"⁷ and to-day the world advances and prospers just in proportion as it regards what these men said and did. What they chiefly did and said was in testimony of Jesus, his miracles, and his resurrection.

Jesus himself bore witness to the miracles. He did this in the most direct and positive

⁵ Luke xxiv, 11. ⁶ Luke xxiv, 36. ⁷ Acts xvii, 6.

manner. When the Baptist sent to inquire whether or not Jesus was the Christ, Jesus replied, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up."

On another occasion, immediately after the working of a miracle, he made such emphatic proclamation of himself as the worker of miracles, and that, too, in the midst of an angry mob, as to lay upon the miracles the entire weight of the cause he had undertaken. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him."⁸

Of the character of this witness there is no room for doubt. Even in his own day, not only those who had known him merely in common fame, but those who by intimate association knew him best, ascribed to him a character above all that is ordinarily called good or great. Far beyond all contempo-

⁸John x, 37, 38.

aries did they rank him. Some believed that he was Elijah; others that he was Jeremiah or another of the olden prophets come back to the world. Herod was not the only one who believed that he was John the Baptist risen from the dead.⁹ Pilate even called him "that just person."¹⁰ The Centurion and those with him hesitated not to pronounce him even "a Son of God."¹¹ Peter confessed that he was "Christ the Son of the living God."¹²

This high estimate of Jesus has never changed. Whatever have been the varying opinions of men as to his Divine personality and the religion which he taught, there has been no variance as to the exalted character which Jesus displayed in his mere human relations. Mr. J. S. Mill ranks him, "even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast."¹³ Mr. Lecky considers him "the ideal character who has done more to regenerate

⁹ Mark vi, 16; Matt. xvi, 14.

¹⁰ Matt. xxvii, 24.

¹¹ Matt. xxvii, 54.

¹² Matt. xvi, 16.

¹³ *Three Essays in Religion*, pp. 254, 255.

and soften mankind than all the exhortations of moralists.”¹⁴

“The wise Jesus,” “the incomparable man,” “in the first rank of the grand family of the true sons of God we must place Jesus,” is the enthusiastic utterance of Rénan. “God does not speak to him from without; God is in him. . . . He lives in the bosom of God by uninterrupted communication. . . . Whatever be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed. . . . All ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there has been born none greater than Jesus.”¹⁵

Theodore Parker testifies that “He unites in himself the sublimest precepts and the divinest practices, thus more than realizing the dreams of prophets and sages; rises free from all prejudice of age, nation, or sect; gives free range to the Spirit of God in his breast, . . . and pours forth a doctrine beautiful as the light, sublime as heaven, and true as God.”¹⁶

¹⁴ *History of Rationalism*, Vol. II, p. 88.

¹⁵ *Life of Jesus*, pp. 94-104.

¹⁶ *Discourses of Religion*, quoted by Dr. Bushnell in “*Nature and the Supernatural*.”

It were needless to comment on the character of this witness. A few remarks only we offer upon the evidence as a whole. It is the very same evidence by which we ascertain the other events of Jesus' life. Where Jesus was born; where and how he passed his boyhood; what he taught, how he taught; whom he made disciples; how he died and was buried,—these are all to be determined by the Gospel histories, and it is to these alone as the simple recitals of the acts of Jesus, that we appeal for proof that among these acts the miracles are found. Viewing, then, the miracles as mere facts of the past, without regard either to the agencies by which, or the purpose for which, they are said to have been performed, we have the same evidence for them as for those other more ordinary events as to which no doubt exists. And we must bear in mind that the evidence is that of the senses, not of the intellect or understanding; that is, the witnesses testified as to what their eyes had seen, and not as to beliefs which had been adopted from a course of reasoning. Had this latter been the case, their testimony had been of little

worth, for testimony can not be admitted as to beliefs or conclusions arrived at by reasoning. The logical faculty is always liable to err except when its decisions are immediate, as when the senses are addressed or where mathematical demonstration is employed. That this is so is seen in the fact that from the same premises different conclusions are drawn by even the wisest and best of men, and when the conclusions differ all but one must be erroneous, and even this may not be correct. But this uncertainty does not connect with beliefs founded upon what the senses tell us. A number of men looking upon a stream or mountain may differ in their estimates of distance, magnitude, elevation, or other things not discernible by the eye; but not one of them believes that the mountain is the stream or the stream the mountain, and not one of them, on a different occasion, believes that he sees such things where none exist. What the eye sees, or seems to see, the mind believes. The belief is immediate, without doubt or reasoning; not only immediate, but irresistible; not only so, but true; that is, the things seen are

actual existences, and not mere states or conditions of the mind. Just as when one sees the sun to rise it is because the sun has risen, so when those multitudes saw, or believed they saw, the miracles, the miracles had been performed. There can be no denial here, except by showing either that those who reported the miracles were in a dream, or had minds abnormally affected, or eyes diseased, so as to be unable to see aright; or that nothing at all was seen, and the witnesses were intentionally attempting to deceive the people.

Now, both the number and variety of the witnesses preclude the idea either of their designed deception of the people, or of their being themselves deceived upon the subject. It must be noted here that there is no variation in the testimony as to these acts of Jesus. The witnesses differed greatly in their ideas as to who Jesus was, some believing that he was the Baptist risen, others Elias or one of the prophets, others an agent of the prince of devils, others the Messiah, the Son of God; but as to the miracles, there is in all their utterances not one word of doubt, controversy, or

dissent. There is here perfect agreement both of the evangelists among themselves, and of the disciples, of the general multitudes, of Jesus himself, and of the scribes and Pharisees, his enemies. If, therefore, a single individual of those witnesses told the truth as to what had been done by Jesus, the truth was equally told by all; and so, if one of them told a designed falsehood, or testified erroneously because of defective vision or disordered mental action, we must believe that all alike were subject to influences that prevented them from seeing or telling the truth of things. Now, while we may easily see that what is told by a number of men in different, independent narratives must be the truth, it would be difficult to find a man not wholly enslaved to prejudice who could admit that great multitudes at different times, in different places, could, even by prearranged compact, tell the same falsehood, or that they could all display the same peculiarities of defective vision, or all alike be deluded by the same phantasmagoria of the brain; and that such numbers of men could testify erroneously to seeing the *same*

things when *different* causes had operated to falsify their visions, is yet more difficult to admit.

Moreover, the circumstances were such that the witnesses could not have been mistaken as to the nature of the facts attested by them. The evidence is that the miracles were performed openly in different localities, and in full view of multitudes of all classes of men in both Church and State. There were no chosen places, no screens or curtains, no mediums or "professors," that could suggest the idea of special contrivance or collusion. The witnesses had, therefore, every opportunity of testing the genuineness of the miracles, and they had the very same means of making satisfactory tests that could be employed to-day. All that was necessary to this was that they could see: see that the leper was healed, that the blind were made to see, that the dead were raised.

And, then, the miracles were generally of such a kind that their genuineness could not be doubted. They could not be ascribed to the subject's faith, imagination, or other oper-

ations of the mind. In many instances they were wrought upon inanimate objects, as in the blasting of the fig-tree, turning the water into wine, finding the coin in the fish's mouth, walking upon the water, calming the storm, and multiplying the loaves and fishes.

It is, of course, readily granted that in the healing of the sick the patient's faith might have effected much, and it would be no dishonor to Jesus to admit that there might have been instances in which Jesus himself exerted no power in the healing. The fact, however, is that very seldom do we find the patient exercising faith. In by far the larger number of cases where faith was manifested or declared, it was the faith, not of the persons upon whom the miracles were performed, but of those who made the request of Jesus in behalf of others. Thus it was the faith of the centurion, not of his servant who was healed; the faith of Jairus, not of his daughter who was resuscitated; of the sisters, Martha and Mary, not of their brother who was called forth from the tomb; and so of other instances that need not be referred to. If the reader

will review, one by one, the different miracles, he will be astonished to see how few were consequent upon, or in any wise connected with the faith of those who were the recipients of the benefits bestowed by Jesus. Nothing could be more absurd, then, than the effort made by some to ascribe these deeds of Jesus to the faith, hope, or other mental state or action of the subject.

Again, the cause supported by the miracles insures us against the idea of those witnesses being mistaken as to what was done by Jesus. That it was a cause upon which depended the most momentous issues—a cause the most difficult to establish the world had known, a cause in many regards the most offensive to human reason, and apparently opposed to at least all earthly interests—must have made those followers of Jesus think long and well, and try all possible tests, before giving in to what made such severe demands upon their confidence, and such sacrifices of their personal ease and comfort. Those men were no more likely than we of to-day to believe that the Son of Mary was also the Son

of God, and they were not likely to leave home, wife, children, houses, lands, and suffer want and persecution in behalf of one who had little else than these experiences to offer, without satisfying themselves of the proof which had been asserted of those bold claims.

And, then, whatever may have been the liability of others to err upon the subject, there was no such liability with Jesus. He knew very well whether he did what he professed to be doing in proof of the Divine authority under which he claimed to act. To speak of the miracles which Jesus *thought* he was working, as Rénan has done,¹⁷ is too absurd for refutation, and can no more be admitted than we can admit that Jesus could have attempted fraud in the accomplishment of the Father's work.

Indeed, the testimony of this last witness is decisive of the question. That Jesus did testify to the miracles has not been doubted or denied. No criticism that we know has attempted to eliminate from the record the passages which set forth this fact, and there is no

¹⁷ *Life of Jesus*, page 232.

conceivable way of escaping or annulling the proof thus afforded in the case. If Jesus was of the character which we have seen has universally been ascribed to him—both upright and wise beyond all the men the world has known—he could not have hazarded his claims upon the profession of deeds that were not wrought; he could not have mistaken for genuine miracles mere feats of jugglery or sleight of hand, which he had himself performed, and much less could Jesus have spoken intentional falsehood upon the subject. He who stood in the “front rank of the grand family of the true sons of God,” and “poured forth a doctrine beautiful as the light, sublime as heaven, and true as God,” can certainly be admitted as a qualified witness to deeds which, he claimed, were performed by himself—performed in open day, before multitudes of people, in various localities, and in behalf of a cause so dear that for its accomplishment he voluntarily laid down his life.

We would now compare the evidence for these events in Jesus' life with that upon which belief is based in other facts of history; and

we are perfectly willing to have the comparison tested by the principle laid down by Professor Huxley, that the question as to what Jesus said and did "is capable of solution by no other methods than those ordinarily practiced by the historian and literary critic."¹⁸

First, let us consider other miracles of which we read, those especially which have been ascribed to "the saints" and others who have figured in the history of the Church.

As to these, our limits forbid that we enter into a minute examination even of a single one of them; but after careful consideration of the subject, we feel prepared to assert the following propositions:

1. In by far the greater number of these pseudo-miracles a living person as the performer of them is rarely seen. The agent that appears as working the miracle is a sacred relic—piece of the cross; blood, bones, or tomb of a deceased saint; consecrated oil or hallowed fountain; and, as Professor Huxley¹⁹ confesses as to the best accredited miracles

¹⁸ Christianity and Agnosticism, page 16.

¹⁹ Christianity and Agnosticism.

recorded by Eginhard, the miracles are all of a class in which "malingering is possible or hysteria presumable."

2. These miracles are either narrated (a) of persons absent and out of reach of the witnesses, so-called, who recorded them, as was the case with St. Xavier, who was in the distant East when the miracles were ascribed to him, and whose letters contain "express disproof" of the miracles;²⁰ or (b) of persons too long dead for eye-witnesses to have borne testimony to the fact, as with Gregory, whose miracles were published a century and a half after his death;²¹ or (c) of those who during their lifetime are well known to have made no profession of miraculous powers, and of whom contemporaries made no such claims, as is the case with the Virgin Mary.

3. Such miracles, therefore, are wholly without the evidence of witnesses who could have known the truth of their assertions.

4. Not one of these miracles is alleged to have been wrought in support of a great cause

²⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1889.

²¹ *Paley's Works*, Vol. III, page 263.

which appealed to them for confirmation, and which was actually founded upon belief in them; not one of them drew upon the witnesses such opposition and persecution as was borne by those who testified to the miracles and the resurrection of Jesus; and not one of them was believed by all classes of men and women to whom they were reported, so that learned, unlearned, friends, and enemies were alike convinced.

5. Consequently no such miracle is established by evidence which will bear comparison with that which we have for the miracles of Jesus.

Let us now see how the case stands with well-known marvels in ancient classic history.

It were folly to consider seriously the comparison which has been often made between the accounts of these deeds of Jesus and the early Greek and Roman legends. Such stories as those of Prometheus, Hercules, Theseus, the translation of Romulus, the conferences between Numa and Egeria, make no show even of a pretense to an historical basis. The authors of such works as contain these and

other like narrations wrote centuries and tens of centuries subsequently to the exploits of these mythical heroes, and not only so, but they recite these things without attaching the least credibility to them. To occupy the reader's time, therefore, with any further comparison here would be like making a stately argument to prove that Julius Cæsar was more of a veritable historical character than Jack the Giant-killer, or that Froude and Freeman are more reliable narrators of facts than the authors of the Arabian Nights or old Baron Munchausen.

We pass on, therefore, to consider the proof of the miracles as compared with the proofs of what we call authentic history; that is, history generally admitted, and as to which, in the main, no doubt is entertained. Very few of the events, at least of ancient history, have been transmitted to us with evidence that can bear such investigation as has been given to those deeds of Jesus. Whatever may have been the materials out of which historians have wrought their narratives, those materials are, with very few exceptions, inacces-

sible to us to-day, and hence our knowledge of ancient history is knowledge, not of events themselves, but only of what has been said of the events by historians who could not possibly have known the certainty of what they wrote. Even in the writings of those who, like *Thucydides* and *Cæsar*, have given us fragmentary histories of their own times, few things are recorded of which the writers had any personal knowledge, and even as to these there are no contemporary authors to confirm their stories. As a general thing, we admit the accounts of the great "authorities," largely because we have no special interest in the matter, and have really no concern whether those accounts are true or false. If we should subject the leading events of ancient history to such criticism as we demand for the miracles of Jesus, where could we find, for instance, proof of the battle of Marathon, the exploits of *Epaminondas* and *Alexander*, the wars of *Marius* and *Sulla*, or the assassination of *Julius Cæsar*? *Herodotus*, the earliest authority that we have for "Marathon," wrote about fifty years after the battle, him-

self being but six years of age when the Persians made their first invasion. It is only through works written several centuries after their deaths, that the deeds of Alexander and Epaminondas are known to the world; and as for the assassination of Cæsar, what appears to be our full knowledge of the event is derived from men who wrote from one to two hundred years after the event occurred. The only contemporary information on the subject is found in the allusions of Cicero's letters and orations, which give us no formal or detailed account of the matter, and the "contents" of the hundred and sixteenth book of Livy, the book itself being now unknown to the world.

Really, all that we can learn of the assassination comes to us from Appian, Plutarch, and Suetonius, who lived a century and a half after it occurred, and Dion Cassius, who wrote more than fifty years still later,—all of whom, according to Mr. Froude, "relate incidents as facts which are demonstrably false."²²

²² Introduction to his *Life of Cæsar*.

And thus we might go through history from the earliest days to a comparatively modern period, and with a like result; viz., that, as a general thing, the so-called facts of the past rest upon evidence which hardly deserves the name, as compared with the evidence we have for the miracles and the resurrection from the dead of Jesus.

But little better appears the evidence on which rests our belief in much that science teaches. It were, of course, absurd to intimate disparagement of the *facts* from which science draws her inferences; that is, so far as these facts have been attested by the senses, or by mathematical computation. Such facts, however, form a comparatively small portion of what passes under the name of science. The greater part of science—science as distinct from the facts on which she builds—is but hypothesis or theory, which, in the very nature of things, can not be classed among things known or proven. The nebular hypothesis, the antiquity of the globe, the descent of man, natural selection, the conservation of forces, the atomic theory, the ethereal

medium, and other like things, would only excite our ridicule were we to call for the witnesses to testify that they are true. Mr. Darwin himself could not have testified that men are but highly-developed orang-outangs, or apes. Mr. Wallace could not have testified to a single fact of natural selection as the controlling force in nature; no physicist has seen an atom or a molecule, or subjected to the test of sense the ethereal medium "which pervades all space;" and not a geologist that lives can bear witness to those long periods of time which we have all come to admit as clearly proved. The utmost that can be said of belief in any of these things is that it is logically derived from consideration of the facts involved in each. But this is only saying that the belief is founded upon a course of reasoning, which is always attended with at least the liability to error. In many cases the reasoning has been conducted through long, laborious processes, in each of which the mind may have been disturbed by one or more of the "idols" described by Bacon. The more of reasoning the more of liability to error, and

the greater the number of reasoners the greater the variety of conclusions adopted; and hence the history of science is a history of conflicting theories, and thus necessarily a history of errors mingled with its best established truths. Every teaching in physical science, beyond the bare foundation of facts, rests upon a basis which may at any time give way. Even "‘the eternal truths’ of which metaphysicians speak have hardly ever lasted more than a generation. In our own day schools or systems of philosophy have died before the founders of them."²³

We must now note that while the progress of scientific discovery and antiquarian research have overthrown much of what both science and history have taught the world, this history on which we found our belief in the miracles of Jesus has remained unchanged. No theory in science—no record of the past—has been more frequently or more critically investigated than have been these records of the life of Jesus, and yet while almost every year weakens our faith in ancient history, and

²³Jowett; Plato 2: 25.

every generation at least reverses large portions of what science teaches, nothing has occurred to change our views of the genuineness or authenticity of the Gospels, from which we derive our evidence that Jesus performed the great deeds therein recorded. Indeed, the true historical character of these Gospels is to-day better established than it has ever been before, even in the days when men still lived who were convinced by those who had been eye-witnesses of the facts to which they testified. All history grows in credibility if it remains uncontradicted while honest research is made, and we have, therefore, no hesitation in saying that, amid all the discoveries of manuscripts and monuments, and all the direct assaults upon the Gospels, the testimony of these to "what Jesus actually said and did" has been confirmed even by the efforts that have been made to prove it false.

Now, we would not undertake to say that the miracles, in consequence of this testimony, are more easily believed than those other things with which they have just been compared. Actual belief depends fully as

much upon the reader's attitude toward the subject as upon the evidence which may have been adduced. There are idiosyncrasies of thought and reasoning which may nullify the evidence, even on the part of those who have determined to be guided by the evidence alone. But waiving all prepossessions and undue assumptions, and taking the evidence as it stands, in its own light and strength, nothing is hazarded in saying that if to the unbiased mind the miracles of Jesus are not fully proven, it is impossible to prove any event of the past; and if the reader does not assent to this, it must be because, in his case at least, other considerations than the evidence have formed his judgment.

CHAPTER III

Assaults upon the Evidence by Rénan, Mill, Huxley, Hume

THE reader will bear in mind that we have been considering the miracles as we would have considered any other events of the past; that is, without regard to the difference that might exist between them and the more ordinary facts of history. Considered thus, it will be admitted that the miracles of Jesus have been established beyond all contradiction. Yet as miracles are not to be classed as ordinary events—as all admit at least their *extraordinary* nature—the evidence given is not satisfactory in the eyes of many, and we must now attend to the leading objections that have been brought against it.

First, however, we must observe the fact that some have paid little or no attention to the evidence, denying the miracles solely upon the ground of their supernatural character.

To this class of objectors belong Rénan and Strauss. Says the former, "Till we have new light we shall maintain, therefore, this principle of historical criticism, that supernatural relations are not to be accepted as such;"¹ and Strauss "knows for certain what Jesus was not, and did not do—that is, nothing supernatural"²—and hence he starts out with the definite determination that "in the person and acts of Jesus no supernaturalism shall be suffered to remain."³

We shall not linger here to show that speaking of the miracles as supernatural is pure assumption. As to the means or agencies by which the miracles were accomplished, we know no more than we know of the creation of the world. One thing is certain: our limited knowledge of nature prevents our knowing the line of separation between the natural and the supernatural, and for aught we know, therefore, the miracles may have been as natural as any other events that have

¹Life of Jesus, p. 45.

²New Life of Jesus, Vol. I, p. 216.

³New Life of Jesus, p. 11 of Introduction.

occurred throughout the universe or throughout all time. Doubtless they were as natural to Jesus; and their supernaturalness to us may consist only in their being inexplicable or unfamiliar.

But waiving this, it requires no very great acumen to expose the fallacy of the objections now considered.

At the outset we would ask where Rénan obtained that "principle of historical criticism" expunging the supernatural from history. From the earliest days the supernatural has been a part of history, and for the simple reason that it has figured so largely among the beliefs of mankind. Not only the four Gospels, the high estimate set upon which by Rénan himself we have already seen, but large portions of the history, both of the ages preceding and of those subsequent to the composition of the Gospels, show this belief to have been not only one of the most deeply fixed, but one of the most widely prevalent known to the world. The belief has not been confined to the ignorant and superstitious; the wisest and best men, by large majority, in all

times, have entertained it, and Rénan has no right, therefore, to set up, by mere assumption, the principle that "supernatural relations" are necessarily false. The true principle applies here that rules in all other relations; namely, that each instance of the alleged supernatural is to be judged by the evidence in the particular case considered. Had supernatural relations been classed by mankind in general, or even by the learned alone, along with things *per se* incredible or impossible—as, for instance, that of a body being, and at the same time not being, or of a body existing in two different places at the same time—Rénan's principle of criticism had been quite valid; but as things now are, while the great masses of mankind, in all ages and of all grades of enlightenment, have included the supernatural equally with the natural in their beliefs, no one man or class of men can presume, by a mere *ipse dixit*, to reject all accounts of the supernatural as incredible or false. The "new light," therefore, which the French savant should have looked for is that which shall *disprove supernatural facts* as such.

Not until the non-existence of a supernatural realm can be proven, can the "relations" of supernatural things be arbitrarily rejected. If there is a supernatural realm—a realm of things not seen by the eye or cognized by the other senses—there surely can be nothing unreasonable in the *belief* of the *existence* of such things; nothing unreasonable, therefore, in admitting well-accredited evidence of their existence at any particular place or time. That there are supernatural things Rénan himself by no means denies, at least not in his *Life of Jesus*. The dedication of his work to a deceased sister shows most plainly, unless he thus means to insult the memory of one dear to his heart, his confident belief in this class of things. He also believes—at least so teaches his *Life of Jesus*—in the being of a God, and not a word here intimates that this belief of his differs from that generally entertained of the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Admitting thus the immortality of the soul and the Divine Existence, he can not, does not, deny the supernatural as such, and for him to announce, therefore, in oracular style,

the falsehood of everything that may be said of the supernatural world, is not only inexcusable inconsistency with his own belief, but is an assumption of the most daring and presumptuous kind.

We repeat, therefore, that supernatural relations are to be investigated, each by its own evidences, and not contemptuously tossed aside as if in themselves unworthy of attention.

Mr. Mill's objection to the supernatural is that it can not be known to us "as such," because it can not be discerned by the senses. "If we had," says he, "the direct testimony of our senses to a supernatural fact, it might be as completely authenticated and made certain as any natural one. But we never have. The supernatural character of the fact is . . . always matter of inference and speculation."⁴

Without the least hesitation or reserve, we may admit every word here written. The supernatural character of the fact is, and in the necessity of things must be, matter of inference and speculation; but inference and specu-

⁴Three Essays in Religion, p. 234.

lation are neither necessarily false nor necessarily untrustworthy. The larger part of what we know, or at least regard ourselves as knowing, is only matter of inference, and much of it at one time was matter of bare speculation. Speculation has started many a current of thought which has ended in inference, which the world has accepted as established truth. What we call gravitation was in this way discovered. Both this and all other forces in nature are known to us only by inference. No one has ever tested by the senses the forces of cohesion, affinity, molecular attraction. All that we know of such forces is the phenomena that we ascribe to their operations. It matters not what we call the force or power to which we ascribe any phenomenon, or class of phenomena, and it matters nothing how much or how little we know of the laws by which it acts in nature; as to the power itself we have no doubt, but the power can be known or believed in by inference alone.

And we do not hesitate, by inference, to discriminate between two or more kinds of forces. We say that gravitation is the cause

of one class of phenomena, while electricity, magnetism, chemical affinity, are causes of other phenomena. We make this discrimination because of our inability to understand how phenomena so diverse can be produced by one and the same natural force. Certainly if the leper was cleansed, and the dead raised by, so far as one could see, the mere speaking of a word, there was a power exerted as different from each of the forces just named, as either of these is different from the others; and this new power evidently belongs to a class of things which can not be identified with any of the forces of which science treats. It can not here be replied that all forces are now considered as but modifications of one original force, for the fact that these modifications are still distinctly named and described, and that science has never yet been able to assert that they are interchangeable with each other as to their operations in nature, so that, for instance, the phenomena of gravitation may be produced by magnetism, or magnetism may accomplish what we ascribe to chemical affinity; the fact that these

distinctions are still observed shows the essential difference in the forces under consideration. Should it be urged that these several forces all *proceed* from one and the same original force, the objection only confirms our reasoning, for we here come to a new force or power lying entirely beyond our knowledge of nature.

This new power must be either supernatural, therefore, or a very remote unknown natural power; and it can make no difference as regards the argument whether this remote unknown power is called natural or supernatural; it is known to us by inference just as logical and scientific as the so-called natural powers are. What we need that we may infer and believe in the power that performed the miracles, is just what we need before we can infer the existence of any other more familiar natural power; namely, the phenomena in any given case; and whether it is our own or others' senses that witness these phenomena, we believe in their existence, and infer the powers by which they are produced when sat-

isfactory evidence is presented that the phenomena exist, or have existed.

This brings us to consider another portion of Mr. Mill's objection to the miracles; which is that the evidence "is not the evidence of our senses, but of witnesses, and even this not at first hand, but resting on the attestation of books and traditions."⁵

True, it is not the evidence of our own senses that we have, but Mr. Mill does not deny that we have the evidence of the senses of the witnesses; and just before penning the above he had, in terms most unmistakable and emphatic, declared the validity of this kind of evidence. "It is evidently impossible," says he, "to maintain that if a supernatural fact really occurs, proof of its occurrence can not be accessible to the human faculties. The evidence of our senses can prove this, as it can prove other things."⁶

The reader must here bear in mind that this objection of Mr. Mill is not that the evi-

⁵Three Essays in Religion, p. 219.

⁶Three Essays in Religion, p. 217.

dence is false or insufficient, but that it is not the evidence of our senses, only the "attestations of books and traditions."

The objection is wholly futile unless it can be shown either that all books and traditions are unreliable, or that these particular books recording the miracles are thus to be regarded. Besides, it were an ample reply to say that the objection, if applied to miracles, might equally be applied to all other events which we have never seen. In taking what was evidence to those disciples and the multitudes as evidence to ourselves, we are only pursuing the method by which all other events of the past have been determined. There is no other method to be pursued. There is no experimental or scientific test that can be provided; mathematical rules or formulæ can here find no place; abstract reasonings are of no avail; the senses, our own senses, can make investigation only of such facts as come under our own observation, and to demand, therefore, the evidence of these for the miracles of Jesus is to attempt the establishment of a principle which would overthrow all history and

many of the best authenticated facts of science. How would the "historian or the literary critic" deal with the narratives of events as to which he might have cause for doubt, and how, in like case, would the scientist proceed? Neither of these would reject the testimony of others merely because they tell of things that have lain beyond the range of his own observations. Mr. Wallace, we believe, once said that if a new fact in science is announced, one's brother scientists accept it with the faith which a devout Romanist entertains toward the dictum of his priest or pope; and this is the way the world at large, both of the learned and unlearned, treats testimony as to things not seen. Thus the ordinary transactions of life are conducted, and the farthest advance of critical thought will never reach the point at which evidence ample, adequate, and unimpeachable shall be rejected, because it can not be subjected to the scrutiny of our own senses. Our confidence in the testimony of other persons' senses is as absolute as in the testimony of our own, provided we believe that others have seen as they declare

they have. When we believe in the veracity of a witness to a case in court, even when life and death are pending, we admit his testimony without the least misgiving, and it never occurs to us to doubt, because we ourselves have not beheld the facts in question.

Those contemporary witnesses believed the miracles, because with their own eyes they beheld what Jesus did, and there can be no doubt that had we to-day the evidence which convinced them of the miracles, we should now believe no less than they believed. No new facts have been developed to diminish or destroy the power of the evidence; the human mind has undergone no change; the advance in science has rendered us none the less qualified to use our eyes aright—none the less disposed to believe what our eyes have seen. Just as an event testified to by witnesses to-day—testified in a way that leaves no room for doubt, and the testimony remaining unimpaired or uncontradicted—would be equally credible two thousand years in the future; so with an event that was properly attested two

thousand years ago. The miracles can form no exception to this statement. The miraculous or, if one please, the supernatural character of the miracles may justify the demand for an extraordinary amount or quality of the evidence; but lapse of time can not affect the evidence already given, neither can the nature of the miracles be taken in proof that the evidence was not given, or that the evidence, when given, was not valid.

The only reason we can have for doubting the testimony in the case before us is the strange, inexplicable character of the facts concerned. But strange, inexplicable things have always been seen as easily as more familiar things, and when a number of men assert that such things have been seen by them, we violate common sense if we reject their statements, unless we have reason, out of and beyond the things themselves, either to charge the witnesses with falsehood in the premises, or with having eyes or minds incapable of performing their normal functions.

Professor Huxley offers an indirect objec-

tion to the evidence in the following spirited style:

“Neither considerable intellectual ability, nor undoubted honesty, nor knowledge of the world, nor proved faithfulness of historians, nor profound piety on the part of eye-witnesses and contemporaries affords any guarantee of the objective truth of their statements when we know that a firm belief in the miraculous was ingrained in their minds, and was the presupposition of their observations and reasonings.”⁷

Whatever be its logical value, a more emphatic statement has not been made in all the literature opposed to miracles. But let us make a brief analysis of it, and see what it amounts to in the way of accomplishing the purpose for which it was designed. Neither intellect, honesty, piety, knowledge of the world, nor even acknowledged historical fidelity can prove a miracle “when we know that a firm belief in the miraculous was ingrained in the minds of the witnesses, and was the presupposition of their observations and reason-

⁷Christianity and Agnosticism, p. 210.

ings." Now, if all this be true, it must be so from the constitution of the human mind, and not because of the particular subject to which, in this case, the mind has been directed.

Professor Huxley would hardly presume, upon his own authority, to single out from all the varied subjects upon which the mind may be employed this one subject of the miracles, and say that it alone so warps and distorts the judgment that even such testimony as he has described can not be decisive of the question. If the professor does mean this, his proposition, instead of being an argument in the case, is only a skillfully-concealed assumption of the conclusion to be established, and amounts to nothing more than a bare denial of the miracles. And so, if he means that all those excellences of intellectual and moral character can not qualify for trustworthy testimony in the case, and yet does not mean to assume the point at issue, he virtually makes the all-sweeping declaration that no man's testimony can avail on any subject, if his mind has been previously ingrained with presuppositions or belief. Now, if presupposition or

belief can render nugatory argument and testimony in favor of the miracles, it must have the like effect upon all reasonings against the miracles. Belief and disbelief are but one and the same state or action of the mind, according to the view or point of observation of the reasoner. Professor Huxley thus becomes entangled in the meshes of his own net. He can not make an argument against the miracles that unbiased reason can admit, nor can he testify as to matters of scientific fact upon the subject. If his recent discussion in "Christianity and Agnosticism" fairly represents the professor's mind, no man has been more deeply ingrained with disbelief; that is, with belief that no miracle has ever been accomplished, and this belief is evidently the presupposition of all he says upon the subject.

The same incapacitation for giving evidence, or making argument, may be asserted more or less of every man who has written either upon this or any other subject in which the laws of nature are involved.

The mind has been ingrained with belief in the universality and immutability of these

laws. Upon this presupposition all our reasonings have been founded. Take away this presupposition or belief, and the fabric of modern science falls to the ground. "Neither considerable intellectual ability, nor undoubted honesty, nor knowledge of the world, nor proved faithfulness of historians, nor profound piety on the part of eye-witnesses and contemporaries" can prove a fact or principle in science "when we know that a firm belief" in the invariability of natural law has been "ingrained in the minds" of scientists, and has been the "presupposition of their observations and reasonings."

Mr. Hume⁸ must now be heard upon the subject:

"There is not to be found in all history any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of all mankind, as

⁸ *Essays*, Vol. II., , p. 122.

to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood, and at the same time attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world as to render the detection unavoidable.”

Let us now compare the different portions of this formidable statement with the facts already given—facts as to which there can be no denial :

“Attesting facts performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world as to render the detection unavoidable.”

The miracles were wrought in one of the most important and enlightened provinces of the Roman Empire, then at the zenith of her glory, and if, in the presence of the vast miscellaneous multitudes that followed Jesus, they were not performed with such publicity as to render detection unavoidable, then such publicity can not be reckoned among things possible to man.

“Of such credit and reputation in the eyes

of all mankind as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood."

Whatever may, or may not, have been their reputation, the witnesses knew very well what they had to lose. Loss of goods, persecution, imprisonment, death oftentimes in its most cruel forms awaited them, whether they were detected in any falsehood or were seen to tell only the undeniable truth. Experiences such as these are terrors to the lowliest and most obscure equally with those of highest name, and in such a case it is folly to argue about distinctions as to the credit or reputation of the witnesses.

"Of such undoubted integrity as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others."

Were Mr. Hume now living, he would see that the disposition to charge the witnesses of Jesus' miracles with intentional deception has long since passed away; and that the problem now is, not to prove the honesty of the witnesses, but, according this in the fullest

degree, to account for the testimony under consideration, if the fact of the miracles is to be denied.

As to the "sufficient number" of men of "unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, to secure us against all delusion in themselves," we would only remark that in the evangelists, disciples, general multitudes, scribes and Pharisees of the Council, we have a number of witnesses such as can not be produced for any other event in ancient history—such a number that any one who can imagine or believe that they were all under a delusion must himself be under the power of a delusion no less potent, and as for "the good sense, education, and learning," these, considering the publicity of the miracles, and the fact that they were all addressed to the senses of the witnesses, were no more necessary to their qualification as testifiers in the case, than had they testified to the healing of the sick or other ordinary events, as to which no miraculous character is pretended. It required no extraordinarily "good sense," extraordinary "learning," or education for the blind man's

parents to know whether the man in John ix⁹ had been born blind, or for the man himself to know whether he had been made to see; and certainly he could know who it was that had given him the power to see. The Pharisees, who tried every means of disproving the miracle, were compelled to admit the fact; and they were so far convinced of what they were informed as to the resurrection of Lazarus from the tomb that not only this, but "many miracles" they declared Jesus had performed.¹⁰

All that was necessary to determine whether or not Jesus had wrought the mighty works recorded of him was for the witnesses to have had ordinarily good eyes and ordinarily good common sense; they must only have been not blind, not idiotic, or insane.

But let us see the objection of Mr. Hume based upon the supposed antagonism between the miracles and the laws of nature. This argument has lost none of its power or popularity during the century and a half that has elapsed since its publication to the world. Mr.

⁹ John ix, 16-18. ¹⁰ John xi, 47.

Mill calls it "an argument which goes down to the depth of the subject,"¹¹ and Strauss considers that it "carries with it such conviction that the question may be regarded as having been by it virtually settled."¹²

"When the fact attested," says Mr. Hume, "is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, there is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other as far as it goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains. The very same principle of experience which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also in this case another degree of assurance against the fact which they endeavor to establish: from which contradiction there necessarily arises a counterpoise and mutual destruction of belief and authority."¹³

"A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against

¹¹ *Three Essays in Religion*, p. 217.

¹² *New Life of Jesus*, Vol. I, p. 199.

¹³ *Essays*, Vol. II, p. 119.

a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”¹⁴

“No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior. When any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened.”¹⁵

It must be noted, before we proceed further, that in the paragraph last quoted Mr. Hume has used the word *miraculous* in a modified sense, a sense wholly different from that demanded by the argument. The opposite of

¹⁴ Essays, Vol. II, p. 120.

¹⁵ Essays, Vol. II, p. 121; see also Strauss's *New Life*, Vol. I, p. 199.

probable—that is, *improbable*—is the meaning now given to the term. “When any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it would be more *probable* that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened.”

It would not be fair to hold the writer responsible for what may have been a mere careless use of language, and demand that *improbable* shall be the sense in which he uses the word *miraculous* in the former portion of his argument, and yet we must not fail to call attention to the fact that he has here virtually abandoned his position altogether. That a *person* telling of a dead man's being restored to life should either deceive or be deceived is, indeed, far more probable than that the fact should really have occurred. One might reasonably be called demented who should believe in a resurrection from the dead on the statement of a single person, however upright, sensible, or learned he may be regarded. In such a case delusion or deception of some kind would certainly be believed; but the res-

urrection of Jesus is a far different thing, and so of the other miracles. The testimony for these is so abundant—the testimony of large numbers of witnesses of different classes, friends and enemies, in different places, at different times—that it can not be, and has not been, assailed, otherwise than by bold denial without the proof, or by assumptions and hypotheses that may either explain away the miracles, or close the mind to the power of evidence that can not be refuted.

Pure assumption is the ground upon which Mr. Hume has based his definition; namely, that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature. For this there is no warrant, either in the teachings of natural science or in the declarations of the Word of God. That a miracle is a violation of the world's *general* knowledge or experience of the laws of nature, no one will undertake to deny; but this only places miracles, as regards this definition of them, upon the same foundation with all new discoveries, even of these laws themselves; and for one to make a distinction here by declaring that such discoveries, once understood, are

seen to be in harmony with all laws previously known, is only saying that we know more of these discoveries than we know of the way in which Jesus wrought his miracles. One can not reasonably say that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, unless he knows all the laws of nature; knows them in all possible combinations or relationships; knows how they have operated in all the past, how they may be made to operate in all coming time and throughout all space; knows them as he knows no other subject, however trivial or familiar.

But saying nothing now as to what is or what is not the nature of a miracle, there are two fundamental errors in this reasoning of the great English skeptic. In the first place, he speaks as if we made experience the standard or basis of our beliefs, an assumption easily seen to be at variance with experience itself, and the uses which we make of it in the enlargement of our knowledge. Our experience is that there are comparatively but few things out of the large number of things believed, as to which experience is the ground

on which our beliefs are formed. Only the very ignorant accept or reject a statement according to its conformity or non-conformity with experience—experience in the sense in which Mr. Hume employs the term. As science advances, and men become enlightened, other sources of conviction come into prominence, and experience is but little regarded where there is evidence of a different kind satisfactory to the understanding. Not only without, but directly contrary to, experience, we accept much of what modern science teaches. The molecular structure of bodies—each molecule so small that, counting at the rate of ten million per second, two hundred and fifty thousand years would be required to count the molecules of a single pin-head¹⁶—the ethereal medium, “impalpable, imponderable, yet infinitely more compact than the most solid substances, which can be felt or weighed, . . . pervading the substances of all bodies with little or no resistance as freely as the air moves through a grove of trees,”—these and other like teachings of sci-

¹⁶Gage's *Physics*, p. 7.

ence are now universally accepted, yet they are not only not in accord with our experience, but to our experience they are absolutely and irreconcilably opposed.

Mr. Hume's second error lies in his idea of "two opposite experiences"—our experience as to the testimony of witnesses, and our experience against the miracles. He speaks as if we really had a number of witnesses to a case in court, some of whom are testifying to, others against, the miracles, and we must decide by subtracting our confidence in the veracity of the one set of witnesses from our confidence in the veracity of the other set. But where are these two sets of witnesses? We have the witnesses who testify that the miracles were performed; where are the opposing witnesses? "One is enough," says Mr. Hume: "Experience is the opposing witness." Experience? There is no experience except that of some particular person or persons, who have acquaintance with a matter derived from personal observation, or knowledge gained by what one sees, hears, tastes, feels for himself, or is otherwise conscious of.

Where, then, is the experience against the miracles? Who knows, who has seen, heard, or otherwise learned for himself, that the blind were not made to see by Jesus, the lame to walk, or the dead to rise? There were those in the days of Jesus who testified, from their own experience, that these things were accomplished; but no experience to the contrary has been recorded.

Our experience to-day may be against our having witnessed those deeds of Jesus; but neither we, nor Mr. Hume, nor any one else of whom the world has heard, has had experience *contrary* to what Jesus is reported to have done. Mr. Hume, accordingly, does not speak of the miracles of Jesus; not once in the course of his entire essay has he applied his argument to these; he speaks of experience in general and of miracles in general—*abstract* experience against *abstract* miracles. Against miracles in general, if the phrase can have a meaning, the world in general may have had experience from the creation to the present day; but this amounts to nothing in the argument, unless it can be shown that there has

been particular evidence against these particular miracles; in other words, that there were contemporary with Jesus those who saw and testified that the loaves and fishes were not multiplied, that the widow's son, and Martha's brother, and Jesus himself were not raised from the dead. The experience of men to-day, in Europe or America, or anywhere else than at the places and times recorded of Jesus, can not be contrary to what Jesus is reported to have done.

Let it be borne in mind, therefore, that whatever be the weakness or the strength of the testimony to the miracles of Jesus, we have no testimony, and the world has none, against these miracles; and by Mr. Hume's own showing, if we make the subtraction called for "between the two opposite experiences," the remainder, large or small, is wholly in our favor.

CHAPTER IV

Alleged Inherent Incredibility of Miracles

WE have seen that objections are made, not only to the evidence, but to the essential nature of the miracles. Somewhat more in detail must these latter objections now be considered.

Büchner says that "we should only waste words in our endeavor to prove the natural impossibility of a miracle,"¹ for "the laws according to which nature acts . . . and matter moves . . . are eternal and unalterable."²

J. S. Mill would have it that "a miracle declares itself to be a supercession, not of one natural law by another, but of the law which includes all others, which experience proves to be universal for all phenomena"³—which is

¹Force and Matter, p. 36. ²Ibid. p. 33.

³Three Essays in Religion, p. 122.

only a more cumbersome way of saying what Mr. Hume has said so clearly—that “a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”

Such assertions, it is easy to see, are all but modifications of the two propositions:

1. That a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and

2. That such a violation is an impossibility.

In other words, the absolute impossibility and incredibility of the miracles is assumed. By *absolute impossibility* we mean impossibility regardless of any power that may be supposed in the performer of the miracles; by *absolute incredibility* we mean incredibility regardless of all evidence of whatsoever degree or kind—that the miracles are incredible in their very nature, incredible because impossible, and impossible because inconsistent with the general order of the universe.

Now, to say that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature is a vague, indefinite

form of speech, which, though apparently very profound and forcible, is easily seen to be exceedingly superficial, and to have little or no weight in the determination of the question. The assertion either means that a miracle is a violation of all the laws of nature, or of only a portion of these laws; or it must mean that each miracle is a violation of some one particular law with whose operation it is inconsistent. If the assertion means all the laws of nature without exception, it is an assumption too absurd to need other refutation than the mere statement of it, for no man has ever pretended to a knowledge of all these laws; if it means only a portion of these laws, it leaves the matter wholly undetermined and indeterminable, for it specifies not which of the laws are to be considered in the question. If it means some one particular law with whose operations miracles can not be harmonized, as, for instance, that Jesus' walking upon the water was a violation of the law of gravitation, the objector himself is presupposing the violation of a law of nature—a law which, as Mr. Mill would say, "includes all others,

which experience shows to be universal for all phenomena; namely, that *no law of nature acts independently and apart from all other laws*.⁴ We know of no law of nature which has its own independent action. Even the falling of a stone involves a number of laws operating in unison toward a common result; and the same, so far as we can ascertain, may be said of every other event, great or small, that occurs throughout the universe. If there is a law of nature, detached, separate, sole sovereign of a realm of its own, acted upon neither by other laws nor by any other external force, such a law is unchangeable in its very nature. In the action of such a separate, independent law we can no more conceive of change than we can conceive the contradictions of a self-evident truth. That a law can not change, violate, or suspend its own action, however, is no more cause for believing it to be unchangeable by a force or power from without, than that a man can not, by the straps of his boots, lift himself into the air is proof that no other power can lift him up.

⁴The Duke of Argyll's *Reign of Law*, p. 76.

Allowing even that for all the time men have been observing nature their observation has been uniformly that of invariable "law" and "order," both the period and the sphere of observation have been too limited to justify conclusions as to that which is universal and eternal. To assert, therefore, either that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, or that these laws can not be violated, or otherwise so controlled as to produce or allow the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, is an instance of universal conclusion from particular premises at variance equally with the principles of sound logic and the humility of true science. It presupposes either a knowledge of nature and her laws possessed only by Him who called nature into being, or the knowledge that there is no God, or if there is a God, he wields, or can wield, no other sovereignty over the works of his hands than such as we ourselves behold or can comprehend.

It is manifest, indeed, that our belief or disbelief of miracles is dependent almost wholly upon the quality of our belief in God,

If there is no such being as a God distinct from the universe, and personal, the Creator and Sovereign of nature, or if God himself is the universe, or a mere law of the same acting from an irresistible necessity, there may be good reason for discarding miracles with the supercilious disdain displayed by Büchner and his school. The reader, however, is assumed to have an entirely different faith. He believes with the old Roman, *Deorum moderamine cuncta geri*,—All things are subject to Divine control; or with the more ancient Hebrew, that the “Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.” He believes with the Duke of Argyll, that “Science is already getting hold of the idea that all kinds of force are but forms or manifestations of some one central force issuing from one Fountain-head of power,” and that this power is God’s. He appreciates the beautiful—beautiful, because to him true—language of Professor Fiske, that “the infinite and eternal Power that is manifest in every pulsation of the universe is none other than the living God;” that “the everlasting

source of phenomena is none other than the infinite 'Power that makes for righteousness.' ”⁵

With our reader, therefore, God's connection with the order of events, or course of nature, is not necessary and mechanical, but voluntary and intelligent. God is in nature, but he is, at the same time, above and superior to nature. He rules in nature, and he rules by general laws; but it is he that rules, and not the laws. He rules the laws, rules them by a law that is above all other laws; that is, by the exercise of an intelligent will. He rules in uniform invariable consistency with this will; but this will itself is that of infinite intelligence, of unlimited freedom, and of infinite superiority to the laws by which he rules, and which he himself ordained.

Miracles, therefore, are not to be judged—accepted or rejected—by comparison with any fixed, unchangeable order in the processes of the physical universe. If matter comprehended within itself all beings and all powers, this way of dealing with the subject might do

⁵ *Idea of God*, pp. 166, 167.

very well; but allowing that there is an Author of nature, the source of nature's powers and phenomena, we have an entirely different norm by which to judge of facts, or reported facts, in the physical world. Such facts as harmonize not with the order of nature may harmonize perfectly with the character and will of the Author of nature. Facts which are not possible to natural law in its own independent action are possible to law under the guidance of an all-wise, all-powerful God. For such facts satisfactory reasons may be assigned, and if, in addition to the reasonableness of the facts, sufficient valid evidence be adduced, these facts must be admitted like all other facts, whatever be our theory as to the way in which they were accomplished.

Taking this view of the subject, miracles are not only consistent with the power, wisdom, and will of God, or of one specially commissioned and endowed of God; they are no less consistent with the principles which control our reasonings and beliefs. It is only the novelty or rarity of miracles which creates the thought that they necessarily imply that at

which belief must stagger. There is nothing in the idea of miracles which does violence to the laws of thought, or contradicts the fundamental perceptions of the mind. Whatever does thus contradict we can not, of course, admit; all the testimony in the world could not convince us that, in the same sense, Jesus caused the lame man to walk and at the same time not to walk; that he multiplied the five loaves, and yet only the five original loaves remained; that he subtracted two from three, and got a remainder of twenty thousand; that he passed from one place to another without going through the intervening space. These things violate the very foundations of belief; they shock our reason. These things we can no more believe than we can believe that black is white, or white black, or anything else that is self-contradictory or absurd. It is plain, however, that miracles do not belong to this class of things. There is, *per se*, no more violence to reason—provided we assume adequate power—in believing that a man was raised from the grave than in believing that he was lifted from the ground or from his bed;

no more innate incredibility in the healing of the sick, or blasting of the fig-tree, or walking upon the water, by the instantaneous exercise of a power invisible to us, than in the doing of these things by instrumentalities operating through periods of time, and manifest to our sense of sight or touch. Neither the instantaneous performance of an action renders it any the less, nor the slow, laborious performance of it any the more, comprehensible to our minds; just as the frequency of an event makes us comprehend it none the more, and the rarity of it none the less. There is really nothing that we comprehend in the sense of understanding either its real nature, or the way in which it has been produced. What we call knowing or comprehending is only the classifying, bundling together, as it were, and naming of things—telling what other things these first things are like—and our belief of things has no connection in the world with our understanding of them. Every day, hour, moment we believe things which no man has understood. We believe them because we see, touch, taste, hear, or have other evidence

which compels belief. This evidence may be that of our senses, or it may be the records of history, or a process of mathematical demonstration, according to the subject under consideration; but in no case is belief conditioned upon our understanding of the thing in question; that is, our understanding how the thing came about, or how it stands related to other things that may have been well-known or familiar to us. The walking of Jesus upon the water, sustained by the approved testimony of those who had opportunity of knowing whether or not this was done, comes within the range of things credible just as really, though not so easily, as his walking upon the land or upon the vessel's deck; and the only reason why we believe the one act more easily than the other, is not that we understand any the better how it is accomplished; we believe the more easily merely because the walking on the land or the deck is an act with which we have been familiar, and which can easily be classed with other acts which we *say* we understand. Familiar or unfamiliar, all that is logically essential to belief in miracles is adequate

evidence in the case, and the miracles become actually credible just in proportion as we bear in mind the power by which they are asserted to have been performed, and consider what nature and history teach of the Divine ends and methods in the government of the world.

In substantial agreement with the above is one of the latest utterances of Professor Huxley: "Looking at the matter from the most rigidly scientific point of view, the assumption that, amidst the myriads of worlds in endless space, there can be no intelligence . . . endowed with powers of influencing the course of nature, . . . seems to me not only baseless, but impertinent. Without stepping beyond the analogy of that which is known, it is easy to people the cosmos with entities in ascending scale until we reach something practically undistinguishable from omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience."⁶

No less pertinent is the admission of Mr. Mill: "Once admit a God, and the production by his direct volition of an effect which in any

⁶ *Essays on Some Controverted Questions*, p. 27.

case owed its origin to his creative will, is no longer a purely arbitrary hypothesis, but must be reckoned with as a serious possibility. The question then changes its character, and the decision of it must now rest upon what is known as to the manner of God's government of the universe."⁷

Let us now see what we know of this—"the manner of God's government of the universe." We are willing to leave the question with those who can not be charged with undue bias in the treatment of the subject. Mr. Matthew Arnold⁸ speaks of "the power that makes for righteousness." Mr. J. S. Mill tells us that "good is gradually gaining ground from evil," and predicts "the very distant, but not uncertain final victory of good;"⁹ while Professor Fiske¹⁰ declares that "the perfecting of humanity is to be the consummation of nature's long and tedious work;" that "from the first dawning of life we see all things working toward one mighty goal, the evolution of the

⁷ *Three Essays in Religion*, p. 232.

⁸ *Literature and Dogma*, p. 54; N. Y., 1877.

⁹ *Three Essays in Religion*, p. 256.

¹⁰ *Destiny of Man*, pp. 113, 118.

most exalted spiritual qualities which characterize humanity."

Now, while perhaps nothing could be further from the minds of these writers than the idea of this glorious consummation being effected, in any sense or degree, by such an interruption of nature's order as is implied in the miracles of Jesus, yet one thing is certain: if nature is ruled by a Higher Power, and that Power has intended the "perfecting of humanity" or the "final victory of God," there can be nothing unreasonable in believing that if this interruption be necessary to the accomplishment of these ends, the interruption will certainly be effected; in other words, miracles will be wrought. There is nothing which science more urgently insists upon than the necessity of means to the accomplishment of ends, which is only another way of saying that all effects must have adequate causes.

"Facts," says Rénan, "are to be explained by causes which are proportioned to them."¹¹ The authors just quoted would cheerfully admit that everything essential to the "consum-

¹¹ *Life of Jesus*, p. 238.

mation of nature's long and tedious work" must surely come to pass, and no one could object to our looking forward and inquiring into the powers or causes by which this result is to be brought about. Why may we not, then, with equal freedom and propriety look backward along the line of history, and seek such causes as have thus far operated toward this accomplishment? We can see no reason why we may not here, in the history of Christian thought, apply the same reasonings by which the scientist draws his conclusions as to the past physical history of our world. If the ethnologist can tell us of the habits of prehistoric man, asserting with confidence that in one region of the globe only the stone age had been reached, in another the age of iron, because present phenomena can be only thus explained; if the philologist, because of certain peculiarities that mark their languages, can assert the migrations of the primitive Celts and Teutons from their original Aryan home, though there be neither record nor tradition of such migrations; if the geologist can point backward to a time when the greater part of

North America was covered with ice and snow as is Greenland now, or when immense forests covered regions where now such a state of things would be impossible, and tells us that he believes in the period of ice and snow, and in those forests of the primeval world, because such facts were necessary as causes to the present condition of things,—if science can deal thus with the physical world, it can not be unscientific or unreasonable to believe that certain things now utterly unknown may have taken place as causes introductory to conditions at present existing in the moral or intellectual world.

In these conditions are facts which are inexplicable even from the “most rigidly scientific point of view” only by the supposition that the regular course of events, or ordinary line of cause and effect, has been broken into somewhere at some time. If all things have gone on from the beginning in one unbroken train of fixed antecedence and consequence; if no extraordinary event, no extraordinary power brought to bear upon the thoughts and passions of mankind—no new force or impulse

in morals or religion—can be discerned among the ordinary forces that have produced the phenomena of the world's present, and for many generations past, intellectual and moral status, how can we account for the present fact and past history of Christianity in the world? The essential difference between Jesus himself and all other religious teachers, and between his system of truth and theirs, and between the agencies by which Jesus and other religious teachers have sought to establish their claims to recognition by the world, together with the superior estimation in which Jesus was held by his contemporaries, and has been held by subsequent ages, along with the success which has so gloriously crowned the work of Jesus,—these are things which can not be explained by natural law or order, by vague discussions of historical development, sociological causes, spirit of the age, or other like hypotheses. Let us suppose that these things owe their origin to the influence wielded by Jesus, believed in consequence of the miraculous powers with which he professed to be invested, to have been an ambas-

sador of peace and righteousness to the world, and all is clear. We shall at least have, in this supposition, the demand made by Rénan, that "Facts are to be explained by causes which are proportioned to them."

Besides being both possible and credible, the miracles, we repeat, were sensible; that is, such as the senses could discern. This fact must not be disregarded, as it affords an ample answer to certain objections which are now to be considered.

Professor Huxley tells us that when a man testifies to a miracle, he not only states a fact, but he adds an interpretation of the fact. "We may admit his evidence as to the former, and yet think his opinion as to the latter worthless;"¹² and Professor Fiske: "Unless the witness has a clear conception of the difference between the natural and the unnatural order of events, his testimony, however unimpeachable on the score of honesty, is still worthless,"¹³ while Rénan declares that "no miracle was ever performed before an assembly of men

¹² Christianity and Positivism, p. 190.

¹³ The Unseen World, p. 136.

capable of establishing the miraculous character of an act."¹⁴

Now, as to the interpretation of the miracles, it must be noted that the witnesses gave no testimony or opinion whatsoever, and as to a "clear conception of the difference between the natural and unnatural order of events," this is no more an element in the testimony to the events themselves than is a knowledge of astronomy part of what a man sees when the sun sets or rises. Those witnesses testified to what their eyes had seen, and that was all. Had they gone farther than this, and asserted that those deeds of Jesus were miraculous in the sense understood by Professor Huxley, Mill, and others, we ourselves, equally with these objectors, should have rejected their testimony as a mere expression of opinion concerning that which the witnesses knew no better than ourselves. Many of us might, indeed, from other causes admit the miraculous nature of those deeds, but not from any testimony of the witnesses. And as to there never having been a miracle

¹⁴ *The Life of Jesus*, p. 44.

“performed before an assembly of men capable of establishing the miraculous character of an act,” if Rénan, by “miraculous character,” means a violation of the laws of nature, all that he here affirms may be readily granted. We fully agree that the assemblies before which Jesus wrought his miracles were not competent to decide upon the miracles as thus defined; and as has just been said, they made no attempt at such decision. Neither could any assembly that might be called to-day decide the matter any better. With all our science, we could not tell whether in any given case a law of nature had been violated, or in any wise prevented from producing its legitimate results. Science may now know only an infinitesimal part of what even the most familiar laws may be made to accomplish. Who knows but that at some future day gravitation may be made to warm our dwellings, light our streets, or become a motive power, drawing with the accelerated speed of falling bodies our locomotives across the continent? Who knows all the capabilities of light, heat, electricity, magnetism, the ethereal medium? All

that the wisest can say of any law as regards the miracles, is that, *so far as is known*, the law has, or has not, been violated. And in all humility we ask, What do we know of this? *Absolutely nothing* that can justify the all-sweeping assertions so often made upon the subject.

Again, we emphasize the fact that the witnesses gave no "interpretation" of the miracles. They testified only to what they had themselves beheld, and no other miracle was wrought by Jesus than such as the plainest, most unlettered man could witness, and of which his testimony was as valid as that of the most learned sage. Indeed, Jesus seems to have guarded this point with the utmost care. He never told the multitudes of miracles wrought in secret, or in distant lands, or in communication with unseen spiritual agents, such as have been often, by impostors, given in proof of their pretensions, and on at least one very marked occasion when it might have been charged upon him that he was professing things the certainty of which the multitudes could not know, he changed the nature

of his act, or added an additional act, as to which there could be no doubt. After the paralytic had had his sins forgiven, "whether is easier," says Jesus to the multitude, "to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Rise, take up thy bed and walk?"¹⁵ as if to say, "You may not know whether this man's sins have been forgiven, but you can see that his physical infirmity is healed."

If it be claimed that the senses are an uncertain source of knowledge, and that, therefore, those witnesses could not have had absolute certainty of the deeds to which they testified, we would refer the reader to what is admitted on this point by Mr. Mill: "The evidence of the senses can prove this (a miracle) as it can prove other things. That our senses have been deceived is a possibility which has to be met and dealt with, and we do deal with it by several means. If we repeat the experiment, and again with the same result; if at the time of the observation the impressions of our senses are in all respects the same as usual, rendering the supposition of their being mor-

¹⁵ Matt. ix, 5.

bidly affected in this one particular extremely improbable; above all, if other people's senses confirm the testimony of our own, we conclude with reason that we may trust our senses. Indeed, our senses are all we have to trust to."¹⁶

Mr. Mill here lays down the conditions under which the evidence of the senses may be taken in proof of miracles. We now maintain that every one of these conditions belongs to the evidence under consideration. The miracles were surely often enough repeated. How many of the sick were healed, how many of the lame made to walk, of the blind made to see, of the deaf to hear; how many of the lepers were cleansed, how many demoniacs dispossessed of their evil spirits, and, besides the general statement of Jesus that he raised the dead, we have distinct accounts of the raising of the widow's son, of Jairus's daughter, of Lazarus, of Jesus himself. Should it be objected that the attendant circumstances in these several cases were not the same, and that, therefore, there were no such repetitions

¹⁶ *Three Essays in Religion*, pp. 217, 218.

as Mr. Mill demands, the reply is (1) that the variety of circumstances only made more manifest the miracles, for each variation showed the more plainly that these deeds were not mere juggleries previously arranged; and (2) whatever may have been the circumstances, the miracles themselves were, all of the like class, the same. The sight restored was, in the one case, the same miracle as the sight restored in the other cases; and so of the hearing, walking, cleansing, and the raising of the dead.

Not only the repetitions called for by Mr. Mill are seen in the accounts of the miracles, but "at the time of observation" the disciples' senses were evidently "in all respects the same as usual." There is no indication of undue excitement on their part, no unusual depression or exaltation of the spirits, no wild fanaticism, no intoxication from wine, no insanity, no more nearsightedness or blindness than is usually found where large numbers of men are concerned; nothing leading to the belief that those witnesses were in any abnormal condition of either intellect or senses.

And, then, each man who witnessed had his senses confirmed by what "other people's senses" told them. That this was the case no one doubts. What one witness professed to have seen was seen by all, and all believed that what they saw was fact.

We desire no better statement of our case than has just been made out by Mr. Mill.

But let us hear Rénan again: "None of the miracles with which ancient histories were filled occurred under scientific conditions."¹⁷

These conditions are thus plainly stated: "Let a thaumaturgist present himself to-morrow with testimony sufficient to merit our attention. Let him announce that he is able, I will suppose, to raise the dead. What would be done? A commission, composed of physiologists, physicians, chemists, persons experienced in historical criticism, would be appointed. This commission would choose the corpse, make certain that death was real, designate the hall in which the experiment should be made, and regulate the whole system of precautions necessary to leave no room for

¹⁷ *The Life of Jesus*, p. 43.

doubt. If, under such conditions, the resurrection should be performed, a probability almost equal to certainty would be attained. . . . If then, on repetition, the miracle succeeds each time, two things would be proven: First, that supernatural actions do come to pass in the world; second, that the power to perform them belongs, or is delegated, to certain persons. But who does not see that no miracle was ever performed under such conditions; that always hitherto the thaumaturgist has chosen the subject of the experiment, chosen the means, chosen the public?"¹⁸

Upon the above we would remark: In the first place, it is not true of Jesus, however, it may have been with others, that he always chose the subject and chose the public. Of course, he did choose the means, and it were absurd to object to this in one who professed to do what none others could; but as to time, place, subject, public, these were in every instance chosen by others, or at least presented by circumstances over which Jesus had no control, unless it be admitted that he pos-

¹⁸ *The Life of Jesus*, p. 44.

sessed power here of the very same kind that must be admitted in the working of the miracles. If Jesus knew beforehand that the fig-tree was going to wither just when it did, and had so ordered his own goings and the goings of his disciples that he passed the tree just in time to curse it, and thus make it appear to have withered in consequence of his words; or if he knew just when a storm was going to rise upon the lake, and just when the storm would abate, so that he could take his disciples into the boat and row out from land, and fall asleep, and be waked up just in time to command, "Peace, be still," and have the ensuing quiet to pass off as the working of a miracle,—if Jesus could choose subjects, times, and places in such a way as this, we make no further argument; our point is gained; here are miracles in knowledge equally striking with any miracles of power, and we could desire none better proven.

Our second remark is: We grant that no miracle, at least none of those by Jesus, was ever performed under "scientific conditions," as prescribed in the paragraph just quoted.

And we can not see what had been gained, or what could now be gained, by having the miracles wrought in the presence of the "commission" which Rénan would name. If it be said that such an assembly would be more careful to ascertain the facts involved, it may be replied that it were hardly possible for a body of grave philosophers, in calmly testing the truth of the miracles, to display the zeal or resolution of those old scribes and Pharisees in their determination to prove the miracles false. See how, in the case of the man born blind,¹⁹ they do all in their power to disprove the miracle. They examine the man himself, they examine his parents, to satisfy themselves that he had really been blind from birth; and that they then grew angry and drove the man away shows how intense had been their interest, and at the same time how signal their failure to *catch* Jesus in a mere act of fraud; and certainly it would not be contended that the priests to whom Jesus himself sent the lepers for the determination of their cleansing,²⁰ could be indifferent or re-

¹⁹ John ix.²⁰ Mark i, 44; Luke v, 14.

miss in doing that as to which law, bigotry, prejudice, hate, all combined to stimulate their zeal. As for a body of "physiologists, chemists, physicians, and persons experienced in historical criticism" being better able to decide the case than were those contemporaries of Jesus, this is manifestly all assumption. Such men could not have made the laws of nature to act any the more or any the less regularly; they could not have caused the daylight to shine any the more clearly, or the eye to see any the more distinctly, or the intellect to apprehend any the more unerringly. Neither could they themselves have seen any better than those witnesses whether or not the lame man walked, or the sea was calmed. That men unskilled and unlearned, like those that followed Jesus, were more disposed than Rénan's "commission" would have been to assign supernatural causes to what they saw, is a fact most cheerfully admitted. But those witnesses said nothing about such causes. Even had they done this, their testimony as to the causes had not invalidated their evidence as to the facts of the mir-

acles. The peasant sees the moon eclipsed, or the tornado carrying desolation in its sweep; sees these things equally with the man of science; and he sees them none the less clearly, and he reports them none the less accurately, because in his ignorance he ascribes them to the agency of supernatural beings, to genii, or demons. As to mere facts, what we require, even with all our skill in criticism, is the testimony of witnesses of good eyes and ears, sound minds, and truth-telling habits; or when such habits can not be ascertained, witnesses of whom we have no reasonable ground for believing them, from moral or intellectual infirmity disposed to falsehood or liable to delusion. Other things being equal in plain matters of eyesight or hearing, the testimony of the illiterate man is equally valid, and is so taken in the courts, with that of the most learned or skilled logician. As to matters generally, matters, too, of the gravest import, "men of the people" and "men of the world" determine both for themselves and others without the aid of "scientific research," "scientific conditions," or wise savans; and the

whole world of "physiologists, chemists, physicians, persons experienced in historical criticism" determine in the very same way. The physiologist tells for himself; so does the physician, so the chemist, so all the world, learned or unlearned, whether one is sick or not, and whether his friend has really died. And were a deceased friend to rise from the grave, the humblest man in the world could tell just as certainly as Rénan's commission could, whether the man was really alive.

CHAPTER V

General Review of the Adverse Argument

WE have now considered the leading objections both to the miracles and to the proof, and we have no hesitation in saying that the proof, so far from being weakened or obscured by these objections, is, on the other hand, confirmed and set forth in clearer light. As to the proof itself, very little has been proposed by way of effort toward a direct refutation of it; that is, effort to prove it false or spurious. It is manifest, therefore, that it is the miracles themselves, and not the evidence, on which the objectors have based their opposition.

In other words, from the nature of the miracles has been drawn the argument by which the fact of miracles is to be disproved, a mode of reasoning in the highest degree absurd, unless it can be shown that in the very

conception of miracles absolute impossibility is implied; and as such impossibility has not been shown, as, on the other hand, the possibility of miracles in the light of theism has been fully admitted by such men as Mill and Huxley—and must be admitted by all who believe in God—to argue against the miracles because of any peculiarity in their nature, were equally unreasonable with an effort to disprove, in the same way, any other things in the least degree peculiar. Such a mode of reasoning, therefore, besides being unsound in principle, would, if generally applied, be found ruinous in its consequences. It would check the advance of science; it would make us reject many of the most familiar truths in history, and cause us, sometimes, to doubt the reality even of what our eyes have seen.

The miracles, like other alleged facts of history, are to be determined, not by consideration of what they were, or how they were performed, but by the simple question whether or not we have the proof. Any other way of treating the subject is unscientific in the highest degree. Professor Huxley says that “the

question as to what Jesus actually said and did is capable of solution by no other methods than those practiced by the historian and literary critic."¹ If this be true, it follows that the like method must be applied in ascertaining, among the many things ascribed to Jesus, what he actually did not say and did not do. But this is far from being the method pursued by those whose reasonings have been before us. Instead of investigating the miracles as the historian or literary critic would have dealt with other events of the past; that is, by impartial consideration of the evidence in hand, these objectors have paid very little attention to the evidence, otherwise than by general, indirect assaults, the tendency of which has been to induce in the reader's mind such opposition to the miracles themselves as might deprive the evidence of its legitimate effect. They have told us in decided terms what kind of evidence can not, not what evidence can, sustain these acts of Jesus; they have given broad general statements of the fallibility of testimony as a means of proof; they have discussed

¹Christianity and Agnosticism, p. 16.

the nature of miracles, and their relation to law or order; but not one of them has undertaken either to rebut the evidence by opposing evidence, or to cast discredit upon the *general character* of the records from which the evidence has been drawn. In instances not a few they have reasoned in a way that sets logic at defiance. Mr. Hume's fallacy is most notorious. From first to last his argument runs upon the contrariety between miracles and experience; but he nowhere tells us whether by experience he means the experience of the reader, the experience of the world in general, or the uniform, invariable experience of all mankind. If he means anything else than this latter definition, he argues in support of a proposition wholly irrelevant, and one that needs no proof; and if this latter definition be his meaning—if no individual of the human race has seen a miracle—his argument is a mere begging of the question, and amounts only to saying that the disciples of Jesus had seen no miracles, because miracles have never been seen!

Mr. Mill, besides the irrelevancy in his at-

tempt to disparage the evidence by calling it "the evidence of books and traditions," most palpably contradicts himself when he objects to the supernatural in the miracles as placing them beyond our ability properly to discern; for he most positively asserts, as we have seen, that supernatural deeds can be known by the senses just as other things are known, and virtually admits that if we reject the testimony of the senses here, we must equally reject it in the other facts of life and history. No less illogical is Professor Huxley seen to be. His argument as to the "ingraining" of the mind proves too much, and therefore fails to prove the point in question. Besides this, a more enormous extravagance was never perpetrated than is seen in the assumption that the witnesses' minds were so ingrained with belief in miracles that no degree or quality of intellectual, moral, or literary character could make their testimony valid. An assumption, this, bold enough and absurd enough as applied to those friends who followed Jesus; applied to those enemies who hated Jesus with a diabolical frenzy, and placed themselves in antago-

nism at every point, the idea that these men were so fully controlled by their ingrained belief as to be compelled to testify to the miracles, and thus strengthen the cause of One they were doing all in their power to resist, demands a credulity at which old Apella might be amazed. If it be allowed that both the friends and enemies of a cause may be so "ingrained" as to pervert the plainest facts, and in the *same direction*, we may throw our logic as well as physic to the dogs, and the world will be the gainer.

As for the effort made by Hume and Huxley to put other alleged miracles upon an equality, as regards the evidence, with those of Jesus, the utmost that their argument can possibly effect is to show inconsistency on the part of those who either accept or reject this evidence. If there are those who, with what to them is satisfactory evidence, will not admit the miracles of Jesus, because this would compel the admission of those other so-called miracles; or who, on the other hand, reject these latter because they have previously accepted these works of Jesus, it is manifest that such

persons base their conclusions upon other grounds than that of evidence, and hence, whatever they may or may not do in the premises, the evidence itself is not affected, and all said about the pseudo-miracles has nothing in the least to do with the case.

Mill, Hume, Huxley, all dogmatically assert what they can not know to be true, when they pronounce the miracles incredible, as being in violation of the laws of nature; and in this assertion they presume to know either that the Author of nature can not, or that he will not, operate his laws to the accomplishment of his own behests.

Indeed, it may be said—with becoming modesty, we hope—that bold assertion, indirection, irrelevancy, foregone conclusion, are leading features of the anti-miracle argument by whomsoever made; and one would hazard little in challenging the entire brotherhood of disbelievers to construct an argument which shall be free from these charges. Theories, not facts; hypotheses, not established truths; assumptions, not generally admitted principles, have largely furnished the material of

the argument, and if the skeptical reader will fairly analyze his own doubts or oppositions, he will find them based upon one or more of these erroneous ways of reasoning.

If the evidence for these miracles is to be set aside, one of the following things must be done: Either show that the testimony given in the Gospels is interpolation introduced by fraudulent or misguided editors or transcribers, and hence forms no part of the original records; in other words, that we have no evidence for the miracles; or, bring forward opposing evidence—the testimony of men who had opportunity of knowing the facts in question, who yet declare that miracles were not wrought by Jesus; or, show more reliable memoirs or biographies of Jesus, which are silent as to miracles; or, take the testimony as we find it, and prove either self-contradiction or mutual contradiction of the witnesses; or, establish the mental or moral incompetency of the witnesses; or, prove an alibi of them, or that they were forced to give their testimony, or that they had adequate reward in view to induce them to invent a gigantic

falsehood; or, finally, show the essential impossibility of the miracles, that is, that miracles are impossible, whether with or without the power of God.

That not one of these things has been done, or even attempted, it is quite needless to assert. The incompetency of the witnesses and the impossibility of miracles have been affirmed; but not only has no proof been offered in the premises, but not even an argument has been adventured on the subject. As to fraudulent or interpolated records of the testimony—or testimony contrary to that of the Gospels—or more reliable records that make no mention of the miracles, or contradictions of any kind among the witnesses, as to the general fact of the miracles being performed, or as to proving alibi of the witnesses, or that they were forced or otherwise made to give their testimony,—as to all these things not one word has been written by those whose objections have been under review.

Whatever may be the power of the adverse argument, before this testimony can be over-

thrown the following questions must be answered:

1. How came it, if the miracles were not performed, that the testimony was given to the world?

2. How can we explain that the testimony passed uncontradicted at the time when, if false, it could have been so easily refuted?

3. How are we to account for the world's high estimate of Jesus, and the establishment of his kingdom in the world?

As to the first of these questions, it will be admitted unequivocally that the witnesses either believed, or they did not believe, the testimony which they gave. There is no middle proposition here. If they did not believe, their testimony was a conscious, if not indeed a fabricated, falsehood; if they did believe in the miracles when no miracles had been performed, they were under the power of some strange infatuation, which either beguiled their senses or befogged their reason, and they were incapable of knowing the truth as to the plainest facts.

Now, let us admit for a moment that the miracles were not performed, and assume that the testimony which we have was a concerted scheme of falsehood. To maintain this position we must show not only sufficient motive for the falsehood, but adequate means for the successful propagation of it among the people; in other words, show both why and how those witnesses so deceived the world.

Let us here consider (1) that Jesus himself bore testimony to the miracles, and (2) that no less positively than either by Jesus or his disciples was the testimony given by the enemies of Jesus. Now, as to Jesus, no one, even of the boldest, has dared to charge him with falsehood, or an invention of the testimony; and while we may easily see reason for his enemies forging evidence in denial of the miracles, it is utterly inconceivable that they should have made up stories in proof that the miracles were performed. We are equally at a loss to understand, or conjecture even, why the disciples and other friends of Jesus should have attempted such a thing. Had those who testified of the miracles been high officials in

a Church of long standing and commanding influence, deriving large income or honors from their offices, there had been some reason for believing that they might, if possible, either have fabricated a marvelous story to exalt their leader and themselves, or done all in their power to make current such a story devised by others. But such advantages were not connected with the cause of Christ. There was no Church except that whose highest dignitaries were their enemies; there were no rewards or honors placed before them, no favors to gain from either high or low. Scorn, contempt, poverty, arduous toil, dangerous travel by land and sea; all manner of discouragement in the way of bonds, scourgings, imprisonments, death,—these were the honors, these the rewards of the testimony by which they would deceive mankind. Would a number of men willfully invent and persistently carry throughout the world a falsehood from which they had not one thing to gain, but everything to lose?

But allowing the frenzy that might have prompted such a course, we can not see how such success should have crowned the mad de-

sign. That one or two men should have formed a plan for the deception of their fellow-men, and for awhile escaped detection in their fraud, is by no means incredible; such things have occurred. But that any considerable number of men should have succeeded through a long series of years in deluding entire communities into the belief of a concerted fraud, among the very people who might have known, if indeed they did not already know, the certainty of the matter—concerted, too, at the very time when the subject of the gross deception was in their midst creating an interest that had aroused the hate and prejudice of the authorities of both Church and State—the fraud not even in the long generations following the deaths of the perpetrators of it being discovered and announced, is incredible beyond expression.

No more plausible is the idea of these witnesses being the subjects of a wild hallucination when they told their stories. Shall it be said that they were weak, credulous men, those early followers of Jesus, sharing thus the general spirit of their age, a love of the

marvelous and a ready belief, without investigation, of whatsoever might strike the imagination, or feed their fondness for the marvelous? Now, however truly might thus be described the Jews in general in those days, nothing could be less applicable than such a description to the men who followed Jesus. We have already seen what kind of men those followers of Jesus were. Let us now see how they behaved themselves as regards the miracles, at least that greatest of all miracles, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. See how skeptical at first they were! The priests appear to have believed in the resurrection from the very first. Their conversation with the guard, and proposal to bribe them into telling that the body had been stolen from the grave, clearly shows us that they entertained no doubt that the resurrection had really taken place; but these disciples, how skeptical they were! In no one instance did they believe mere rumor or report, or even the solemn asseverations made by members of their own body. When Mary and the other women reported that Jesus was alive again, they scouted

at their words as "an idle tale" or *nonsense*,² as the word may be better rendered. When the two that went to Emmaus informed the others that they had seen their Lord, again they would not believe.³ When Jesus appeared before them on the evening of the same day,⁴ he had to upbraid their unbelief, and gained their assent only by calling upon them to handle his hands and feet, and see. Thomas, informed of this occurrence, would not believe until he had not only seen with his own eyes, but had laid his finger into the print of the nails, and had thrust his hand into the wounded side of Jesus.⁵

Had there been any error or deception here, or had the disciples been under the power of some strange, mysterious spell that hoaxed or befooled their visions, they certainly had ample time, as they had ample occasion, for their disenchantment. Had their training, or want of training, made them content with their belief without investigation further than they had already given, or had they,

² Ἀῖπος, Luke xxiv, 11.

³ Mark xvi, 13.

⁴ Mark xvi, 14; Luke xxiv, 36.

⁵ John xx, 24 to 31.

from any cause, been insensible to the obligation of ascertaining the truth of the matter, they could hardly have remained long in such indifference; the hard fates encountered had waked them up to at least the possibility of their being deceived, and made them look about for proof—absolute proof; proof against which not even a suspicion could be raised. But those disciples seem not only to have had proof perfectly satisfactory to themselves, but proof equally satisfactory to those before whom they laid their cause. So far from having the least suspicion of error or deception, they go forth with a boldness almost superhuman, and succeed in making multitudes of others believe the very things that had set them wild. Set them wild? Could men with such confidence in their statements, and such success in making others, even their deadliest enemies, equally confident with themselves—could these men have been wild, insane? These men, all, both those who told and those who heard, believed the wonderful story. Strange infatuation this! A number of men had seen something, or thought they saw it,

which they took for Jesus risen from the dead; they had seen divers persons or things in divers places, which they had imagined to be their risen Lord, and these grotesque imaginations they had passed off as sober facts upon thousands of sober-minded people, who themselves likewise immediately set to work telling the same absurd stories; all of them, besides making fools and madmen of themselves, liable at any time to stripes or crucifixion, and yet ultimately establishing their wild delusion as the controlling belief of the leading nations of the globe!

Now, allowing such wholesale delusion to have been possible, how did it first get a start among the people? How, in what condition of things, in what event, in what interest, prejudice, superstition, could it have originated?

Inasmuch as this idea of delusion has been made so popular through the writings of Rénan and Strauss, we must consider it somewhat more at length. Seeing the impossibility of refuting the evidence, these authors have accepted the testimony as true, in the main,

in regard to the subjective facts concerned; they have denied the objective reality of the miracles. The miracles were mere beliefs, visions, hallucinations, or illusions.

Thus Strauss:

"Isaiah had prophesied that at that time, the time of the Messiah, the eyes of the blind should be opened, and the ears of the deaf should hear; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the stammerer shall speak fluently. Thus it was known in detail what sort of miracles Jesus, having been the Messiah, must have performed; and so it happened that, in the earliest Church, narratives might be—nay, could not fail to be—invented without any consciousness of invention on the part of the authors of them."⁶

That is, the people believed the miracles, not because they had been performed by Jesus, but because they, the people, were expecting that miracles would be performed when the Messiah should appear.

Several objections, any one of which is

⁶New Life, p. 202.

fatal, present themselves immediately upon the reading of this myth theory of the great German skeptic.

In the first place, Strauss has not shown⁷ us that the Jews placed such literal interpretations upon those ancient prophecies, and we can not believe that such vast numbers of men were so illogical as to have reasoned in the way here asserted of them. The Messiah *would* work miracles. Jesus was the Messiah; therefore Jesus *had worked* miracles! Men might reason thus on mere abstract propositions, or about things as to which they could not know the certainty, but never as to plain statements of facts, the reality or unreality of which was matter of eyesight, no mere inference or interpretation. Even allowing that the prophecies concerning the Messiah might have given rise to the belief in such miracles as Strauss has named, there is a large variety of them as to which the belief can not possibly be thus accounted for. Those prophecies

⁷ There is no contemporary Jewish history of those days; that is, none except the Gospels: no contemporary works of any kind by Jews.

made no promise of such miracles as walking on the sea, withering the fig-tree, or raising the dead, or of Jesus himself rising from the grave.

And, then, granting that "the earliest Church" might have believed the miracles in the way explained by Strauss, it certainly will not be admitted that thus the belief originated on the part of those who denied the Messiahship of Jesus.

This theory violates both the logical and the chronological order of events in the life of Jesus. It violates the logical order in making the myths arise out of the belief that Jesus was the Messiah; whereas the records—the very records which Strauss makes the basis of his argument—show that the belief in the Messiahship arose out of the working of the miracles. "We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him."⁸

The theory violates the chronological order in assuming that the belief arose only after

⁸John iii, 2.

Jesus had virtually accomplished his ministry, at least as a divine commissioner from God, while we know that the belief existed almost at the very opening of the public life of Jesus. Only a short time after the baptism was held the conversation with Nicodemus, from which quotation has just been made, and it was but little subsequent to this that Jesus declared, as evidence of his Messiahship, that the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, and the deaf heard, and the dead were raised.

Again, it is not conceivable that myths as to the miracles could have arisen among a people who were contemporaneous with Jesus. Admitting all that may be said as to the rapidity with which myths may be formed, it is impossible to believe that untrue stories of the miracles could have connected with the name of Jesus, Jesus himself not only being yet alive, but even now and then, on different occasions, calling their attention to the facts as to which the myths are said to have been believed. Had Jesus said nothing at all about the miracles; or had he merely claimed the

power, or only made the promise to perform them at some other time; or had he given accounts of miracles performed in distant places, or in some past time, so that those whom he addressed had had no opportunity of ascertaining the truth of what he said; or had the miracles been reported by others only after the death of Jesus, we might readily see how among throngs of friends and admirers such myths or legends, as Strauss supposes, may have arisen, even at a very early day, and been credited by many as actual facts. But however such myths may have been regarded by others, we can not believe that those disciples, intimate associates of Jesus, could have been deluded by them. Such men certainly knew whether they saw the miracles, or were merely listening to vague rumors that had no other foundation than their uncertain interpretations of a few ancient prophecies. Can we conceive of a man, even of large numbers of men, not knowing the difference between a set of myths and actual facts which purported to have fallen under their own immediate observation? And could Jesus himself have

either believed or propagated myths as to things said to have been accomplished by himself? or could he have gotten the multitudes to believe that they had seen habitually, from day to day, things which both eyesight and memory told them they had never seen? We might ourselves to-day be deceived into believing as facts what were only the legends of an age long past; but unless we should lose our reason, nothing could make us thus to blunder in regard to things said to be taking place before our very eyes.

Of this myth theory Rénan makes application only to the raising of Lazarus from the grave. In the first edition of his *Life of Jesus* (page 304, etc.), he freely admits that "something took place at Bethany which was regarded as a resurrection," but attempts to make it a mere trick of Lazarus, who had "caused himself to be swathed in grave-clothes *as one dead*, and shut up in the family tomb;" that Jesus *thought* Lazarus was dead, and upon having the stone removed, that he might once more look upon the beloved form, better than was expected, Lazarus actually did come

forth, and then Jesus thought, and the friends and relatives present all thought, that there was a resurrection from the dead!"

Rénan himself could not endure to see this folly abiding permanently in his book, and hence, in a subsequent edition, he "interprets" differently that "supernatural relation." He now has it that a conversation as to the necessity of some great miracle to persuade the people had gotten turned and twisted until, by frequent repetition, what was originally a mere supposition or suggestion had, in the popular belief, come to be an actual fact. Let us see what he says:

"Weary of the poor welcome which the kingdom of God was receiving from the Jews, the friends of Jesus, it seems, desired that some great deed should be accomplished which would boldly strike the incredulous Jews. A resurrection appeared to be what was wanting to convince them. We may suppose that Mary and Martha opened the subject to Jesus. Rumor had already ascribed to him two or three deeds of this kind. 'If one should rise from the dead, doubtless,' ex-

claimed the pious sisters, 'the living would perhaps repent.' 'No,' said Jesus, 'even should a dead man rise to life, they would not believe.' Then, as they recalled a story which was familiar to him, that of the poor Lazarus who had died and been carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, 'No,' again replied Jesus, 'they would not believe though Lazarus should return.' In course of time singular misunderstandings arose as to this conversation. The hypothesis became fact. Lazarus was spoken of as raised from the dead. . . . When we bear in mind what cock-and-bull stories arise from the gossipings of an Oriental village, we can not regard it impossible that a report of this kind should have reached Jerusalem, and been attended with fatal consequences."⁹

As to the resurrection of Jesus, Rénan resorts to the notion of illusions or hallucinations. Strauss, here, still holds on to his myths or legends; but his explanations are so similar to those of the French critic that a sep-

⁹ *Vie de Jesus*, XIIIth Edition, p. 372. Paris, 1867.

arate presentation of them need not here be given.¹⁰ We present, therefore, only the resurrection as explained in the Frenchman's "Life of Jesus:"

"The disciples during the first hours which elapsed after his [Jesus'] death, had in this respect no fixed hope. The sentiments which they so artlessly confide to us show that they believed all to be over. They bewail and bury their friend, if not as one of the common herd who had died, at least as a person whose loss was irreparable; they were sorrowful and cast down; the expectation which they had indulged of seeing him realize the salvation of Israel is proved to have been vanity."¹¹

"The reign of God and the reign of the Spirit consisted, in their ideas, in a complete transformation of the world, and in the annihilation of death. To acknowledge that death could have the victory over Jesus, over him who came to abolish the power of death, this

¹⁰ *New Faith and Old*, p. 79; also *New Life of Jesus*, I, p. 420.

¹¹ *The Apostles*, p. 54.

was the height of absurdity. The very idea that he could suffer had previously been revolting to his disciples. They had no choice, then, between despair and heroic affirmation. A man of penetration might have announced during the Saturday that Jesus would arise. The little Christian society on that day worked the veritable miracle; they resuscitated Jesus in their hearts by the love which they bore toward him. They decided that Jesus had not died."¹²

See now his explanation of the appearance of Jesus to Mary:

"Peter and John having departed from the garden, Mary alone remained at the edge of the cave. One sole thought occupied her mind, Where had they put the body? Suddenly she hears a light rustling behind her; there is a man standing. . . . She thinks that she hears herself called by her name, Mary. It was the voice that had so often thrilled her before. It was the accent of Jesus. . . . The miracle of love is accomplished.

¹²The Apostles, p. 56.

. . . 'The resurrection has its first direct witness.'¹³

One other "interpretation" of these "supernatural relations" we give—the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus:

"They were conversing together over the recent events, and were full of sadness. On the road an unknown Companion joined them, and inquired the cause of their grief. 'Art thou, then, the only stranger at Jerusalem, that thou knowest not what things are come to pass there?' . . . The day was drawing to a close; the memories of the two disciples become more vivid. This hour of the evening meal was that which they remembered with the greatest pleasure and regret. How often had they, at that very hour, seen their beloved Master forget the duties of the day in the abandon of pleasant conversation, and, cheered by the repast, speak to them of the fruit of the vine which he should drink anew with them in the kingdom of his Father!

¹³ The Apostles, p. 60.

. . . Giving way to a sort of pleasurable sadness, they forget the stranger; it is Jesus whom they see holding the bread. . . . The conviction of the two disciples was that they had seen Jesus.”¹⁴

Of like character are all the “interpretations” by Rénan, of Jesus’ meetings with the disciples.

Several considerations the reader must now note in regard to these efforts to explain away the facts in the face of the testimony which has been admitted.

Rénan and Strauss both accept the subjective verity of the Gospel miracles; the objective facts must, therefore, be allowed, unless the subjective verities can be otherwise best explained.

Aside from the Gospels there are no written documents or other information as to how these illusions could have originated; none, at least, except the apocryphal writings which likewise narrate miracles in the life of Jesus. Whatever is said, therefore, by way of ac-

¹⁴The Apostles, p. 65.

counting for the belief in miracles as recorded in the Gospels must be bare hypothesis.

If the "historical" or "literary method" is to be pursued in this investigation, not every supposition that has plausibility can account for the origin of these visions or beliefs; the supposition must rest upon a basis of generally admitted historical facts as distinguished from all mere speculation or hypothesis.

The supposition or hypothesis, therefore, must itself need no explanation; that is, it must not call for other hypotheses in explanation of itself, neither must it, without other such hypotheses, be more difficult to explain than the beliefs in explanation of which it has been devised.

Any hypothesis that would be accepted by the historical or literary method must not only satisfactorily account for these visions or hallucinations; it must be the only satisfactory explanation that can be given of them. So long as two or more hypotheses can account for any given fact, whether of the laws of matter or in the workings of the mind, such fact

remains wholly unexplained; just as no man is proven guilty of a crime so long as it can be shown, with equal plausibility, that any other man, or men, might have done the deed.

Now, it is quite easy to see that none of these conditions have been fulfilled in the "interpretations" which have been given. Rénan has not offered a better explanation of the subjective facts than would be the simple admission of the miracles. Though recognizing the necessity of having a true historical foundation upon which to rest his hypothesis, he has utterly ignored, or at best has sadly perverted, the history in the case, and given us a mere theory which is in direct contradiction of the facts even as acknowledged by himself. Indeed, in the very statement of his premises, he so glaringly contradicts himself as to make it appear that he had given the subject but little serious consideration. First, he tells us that the disciples thought that in the death of Jesus all was lost. "They bewail and bury their friend, if not as one of the common herd, at least as a person whose loss was irreparable; they were sorrowful and cast down;

the expectation they had indulged of seeing him realize the salvation of Israel is proved to have been vanity."

And yet a little further on he has these same disciples so sanguine in the hope of a resurrection, that "a man of penetration might have announced on Saturday that Jesus would arise;" that is, the disciples were so hopeful of a resurrection that the hope would soon, to them, become father to the fact, and they were going to announce, and at all hazards maintain as actual occurrence, that which had only been their intense desire.

Again, Rénan has not only thus—by his perversion of the records—virtually acknowledged that he has no historical basis for his supposition, but he has widely erred as to the scientific facts involved. He contradicts the facts and principles of a correct psychology. He has failed to consider that while the mind which believes or hopes may sometimes, in imagination, see the object believed in or desired, the mind which despairs or disbelieves can have no such imaginary views of things. A strange philosophy this which makes the

disciples, believing that Jesus was dead and all was over, so confident of seeing him again, that while his body is decaying in the ground they imagine that they do actually see him again, handle his hands and feet, dash into the sea and swim to him ashore, hold long communications with him, listen to his teachings concerning the kingdom of God,¹⁵ and keep up these experiences for forty days; or, as Rénan would say, for months, or even a couple of years.¹⁶

What a travesty of the facts and workings of the human mind! Two or more persons,¹⁷ beholding in imagination the same thing at the same time, and hearing the same sounds, without one of them, by word or otherwise, making the least suggestion to the others; two men, walking,¹⁸ talking, passing the evening with a third man, both falling, at the same time, into the same reverie; both "coming to" at the same time, and ever after thinking that the third man had been a fourth man whom they had seen dead and buried three days be-

¹⁵ Acts i, 3.

¹⁷ Matt. xxviii, 1.

¹⁶ The Apostles, p. 312

¹⁸ Luke xxiv, 13.

fore! Seven men,¹⁹ all seeing at the same time an eighth man at a distance on the shore, all hearing him address them in the same words, when there was no eighth man there; eleven men,²⁰ all at the same time seeing, conversing with, and handling, hand and foot, a twelfth man, when no such man was near; more than five hundred²¹ men at once seeing the same form and hearing the same voice, and all ever afterwards believing to have been a reality, and so declaring at the peril of their lives what had been only a figment of the imagination! One of these madmen,²² a poor fisherman of the lakes, in a single harangue, a harangue in which he had the insolence to charge upon his hearers as they stood before him, that they "had taken and with wicked hands" murdered this same Jesus, whose resurrection he was announcing, has such power in the telling of his wild hallucination that three thousand of the murderous throng accept the story with a readiness that can be explained only by the idea that all along they themselves have either

¹⁹ John xxi, 1.

²¹ I Cor. xv, 6, etc.

²⁰ Luke xxiv, 33, etc.

²² Acts ii, 14, etc.

known the resurrection to be a fact, or have been under the same insane delusion that has maddened Peter. At any rate, the fisherman carries the day, and upon the conviction created by his words is founded, among the most determined enemies, a faith that overpowers opposition, grows with the lapse of centuries, and is to-day the most potent factor in life, morals, civilization, and religion known to man.

It is not now necessary to say that Rénan's hypothesis needs an additional hypothesis to explain itself, and is more difficult of explanation or belief than the proposition in explanation of which it was devised.

Strauss perceived very clearly the frail support on which he rests his theory of the miracles, and hence, after a formal statement of it, he candidly speaks of it as "the *assumption* which I have made, and which is not without contradiction."²³

As for Rénan's cock-and-bull story method of explaining the resurrection of Lazarus, it is too ridiculous to justify a comment.

²³ New Life of Jesus, I, 202.

Let us now consider the second question, **Why this testimony was never contradicted.**

Let us note how the testimony came to be given to the world. The multitudes who testified evidently did so out of their irrepressible admiration of Jesus and his mighty works. The evangelists reported the miracles as portions of the life of Jesus, appearing to have no other purpose than faithfully to record the deeds and sayings of their Master; Jesus himself and his disciples made the miracles the grounds upon which it was claimed that the Messiahship should be admitted. The enemies of Jesus gave their testimony in the bitterest hatred of Jesus and his cause, and in face of the fact that the miracles were the very means by which, more than all others, this cause was making advancement among the people. Now, it can not be believed that the testimony thus given should have been allowed to pass uncontradicted. Certainly there were reasons why this should not have been the case. The reports of the evangelists, if in the least regard liable to criticism or objection, had been contradicted, if not from the

disposition to check the spread of error, at least from the unwillingness of men silently to allow one of their number to be so highly exalted above themselves. Those religious leaders of the people, proud, arrogant, vain, intolerant, had not for a moment submitted to this, could there have been the least semblance of plausibility in their denial of the miracles.

And yet how many occasions there were when such denial had been in place, was even challenged by both friends and enemies. When Jesus said, "Believe me for my works' sake," "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me," "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not," he challenged contradiction from whatsoever source it might arise. When Peter preached "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God . . . by miracles, and wonders, and signs, *as ye yourselves also know*,"²⁴ "this Jesus hath God raised up, *whereof we all are witnesses*,"²⁵ he held himself and his fellow-disciples responsible for the proof of what he said, and virtually dared high priests, scribes, and Phari-

²⁴ Acts ii, 22.²⁵ Acts ii, 32.

sees, all, to deny the declaration. How easy and how opportune had been denial here! How easily the people might have clamored out to Jesus, We do not believe; the works of the Father we do not see, have never seen! How easily those priests, with the guard, might have rushed among the multitude, declaring that all that Peter said about the resurrection was a falsehood, they had the witnesses there to prove it such!

Nowhere, throughout the entire land, from any sect or class came one word in denial of any of the miracles. These were sometimes ascribed to other sources than the power and will of Jesus—sometimes to God,²⁶ sometimes to Beelzebub;²⁷ but this, so far from being a denial, was an admission, clear and unequivocal, that the miracles had been performed. Not only so; “many miracles” were openly confessed, even by those intolerant Pharisees; though every time a leper was reported healed, or a blind man made to see, or the lame to walk, the foundations were more and more shaken of that proud sacerdotalism which, had

²⁶ John ix, 24.

²⁷ Mark iii, 22.

it had the power, would have rent the earth and heavens, rather than the cause of Jesus should prevail.

It belongs to the unbeliever to show why the miracles were not denied; or if the denial was ever made, why it has not been transmitted to our times. Professor Fiske would have it that this argument, based upon the want of denial of the miracles of Jesus, is equally applicable to the miracles of Apollonius and Simon Magus. At no other time has the professor so closely imitated the "bonus Homerus" of the olden time. But certainly he is napping here. As for Simon Magus, our only knowledge of him is what we get from the "Acts,"²⁸ where, among other like things, we learn that he had befooled the people by his sorceries, and had given out that "himself was some great one," and all that we know of Apollonius comes from Philastratus, who wrote more than a hundred years subsequently to his hero's death. That the miracles of Apollonius and Simon Magus, therefore, were not denied makes no figure whatever in the

²⁸ Acts viii, ix.

argument. There has been no need of denying that for which there is no authority. We ask again why the miracles of Jesus were never contradicted by those who knew, or might have known, the facts concerned. When the evangelists put on record their own positive testimony, that of the other disciples, that of the common people, that of Jesus himself, and that of those violent enemies of Jesus, how did it occur that no one made or recorded a denial, with the proof, of such enormous falsehoods?

The question remaining to be answered is, How came the world to have its high estimate of Jesus, and how came to be established that remarkable kingdom which he preached?

What the world's estimate of Jesus is, we have already seen. Of no other name can such things be spoken as have been declared of the name of Jesus. Whatever men's creeds or practices as regards the religion he came to teach, all admit that the world has had no equal to Jesus of Nazareth. The quotations made to this effect in a preceding portion of our argument have all been taken from men

who disbelieve the miracles, and some of whom are open opponents of what we ordinarily call the true cause of Christ, yet the warmest advocates of this cause could not assert the exalted character of Jesus in terms more cogent or more beautiful. "Jesus, the name high over all," expresses a sentiment felt and appreciated by all classes and grades of men. Greek, Roman, Protestants, Catholics, infidels, atheists, agnostics, many of the Jews, and Mohammedans even, all unite in this one utterance; and perhaps not an intelligent man in the civilized world can be found who would dissent from the proposition that "among the sons of men there has been born none greater than Jesus," "the incomparable man," standing in "the first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast," "in the very front rank of the grand family of the true sons of God."

And the kingdom which Jesus came to establish is now the ruling kingdom of the world. For sixty generations it has been exercising sway more and more along the ages. Divine or human, the kingdom is among us;

Divine or human, it has worked its way among the nations, and, more than all other forces combined, is lifting them up to higher planes of life and enterprise. Mr. Buckle²⁹ and others may deny that the truths preached by Jesus have been the power that has made the nations of the modern world; but the fact stands before us, that these nations did not acquire their ascendancy until these truths had wrought their way among them, and it is undeniable that power, virtue, progress, individual and national well-being are found to-day among the nations just in proportion as these truths have been the controlling forces in the hearts and lives of their citizens. Matthew Arnold's "power" is making "for righteousness" throughout the world; Mill's "final victory of good" is coming more and more certainly into view, as we contemplate the future; and Professor Fiske's "perfecting of humanity" can be doubted only by those who close their eyes to the facts of history and daily observation. Whatever the phrase by which this truth of the ultimate elevation of human

²⁹ *History of Civilization*, I, 183.

character may be expressed, the power by which it is to be effected, or by which at least it is being effected now, is the power of the kingdom which Jesus preached.

Now, these facts—the world's high estimate of Jesus and its acceptance of his kingdom—must be accounted for.

CHAPTER VI

Miracles the only Explanation of Christ's Power and Kingdom in the World

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ARGUMENT

NOT to the exalted character of Jesus and his sublime moral system are those facts to be ascribed which have just been considered. Neither Jesus himself nor his disciples demanded the world's submission to his teachings on any such grounds as these. The world in those days was not far enough advanced to be so impressed with the truth and beauty of mere moral forces. Neither is the world to-day, even in its most enlightened portions, capable of feeling and appreciating the power of such a life and character if associated with the repellent circumstances which beset that carpenter's Son, as without the prestige of either rank or learning, without friends in power or wealth to aid him, he went about

teaching that if men would abandon father, mother, brother, sister, wife, houses, lands, and whatsoever else was dear, bear all manner of shame and opposition, and, if need be, even death itself, they might be his disciples, and follow him! Take the most highly-cultured Christian community on the globe, send forth into its midst a poor man of humble life teaching contrariwise to prevailing beliefs and interests, and we should soon see whether or not he would receive the honor which his contemporaries bestowed on Jesus. In the Church of God itself the poor patronless man comes off well with the name of crank or heretic if he undertakes to correct false ideas or establish new beliefs. Let such a one insist that his teachings *shall* be accepted, that all his innovations in belief and practice shall take the place of those which for generations have been deeply fixed in our hearts and consciences; and besides the scorn, contempt, and angry denunciations of the rabble, he would soon discover that ecclesiastical censures have not failed, nor anathemas been exhausted. What, then, would be the case if this poor

man—telling us that our religion is little better than hypocrisy or a superstition, our bishops, elders, Doctors of Divinity, and theological professors only blind leaders of the blind—should claim for himself a wisdom and authority nowhere known to belong to man, a dignity and glory before which that of the greatest potentates of the world must dwindle into insignificance? Can we conceive an elevation of character either on the part of the teacher or the taught, that could make us, while one talked so wildly, accept his teachings? Not only so, but leave all, and follow him? Not only so, but, after the powers of both Church and State have put to death the rash enthusiast, worship him as God, and go forth proclaiming his honors to the world, bearing not only the reproach, but the severer penalties of our mad career?

Allowing all that may be claimed in general for the power of a noble life in enforcing new and difficult truths, when we come to apply the argument to the case before us it most signally fails. Without the miracles it is impossible to see that Jesus displayed the

life or character to which his power in the world has been ascribed. It is by the miracles, almost wholly, that either the world to-day or the men to whom Jesus preached came to know what kind of a man Jesus was. That inexhaustible benevolence, tender compassion, and forgiving love which endeared him to his contemporaries, and with which his name has been a synonym for centuries, were seen chiefly, if not entirely, in the miracles which he wrought. It is recorded of him that he "went about doing good;" but how this was done without the miracles the records give no information. How, then, can we, without the miracles, ascribe to Jesus that beautiful character with which he has so powerfully impressed the world? Where did Mill, Lecky, Rénan, Rousseau, James Freeman Clarke, and others get those glowing tributes they have rendered to the name of Jesus? Not from the redemptive work of Jesus, his sufferings upon the cross for man's salvation—this work these men deny equally with the miracles; not from the enthusiasm of personal affection or zealous devotion to his cause, for this cause

most of them at least have totally ignored; not from the general tenor of the life of Jesus, for, robbed of the miracles, few biographies have been more barren of great and good achievements. Nor yet again from those remarkable teachings of Jesus could such ideas of his character have been derived. Men can not be judged by what they say or teach. Not all those who have been distinguished for pure and elevated teachings have been equally distinguished for their pure and noble lives; and hence the world has long ago determined to judge of men not by what they teach, but by what they do, and how they live. Even exempting Jesus from this rule, and basing our judgment upon his teachings, we leave the problem still unsolved. Indeed, there are parts of these teachings which render the problem yet more difficult. Much that Jesus taught was in connection with the miracles, and one very striking thing he taught, taught more than once—taught publicly and most emphatically—was that he did work miracles, and that these were the proof that, as of a teacher sent from God, his other teachings

were absolute, eternal truth. But the miracles he did not work! In plain statements of fact, which all could know and comprehend and test, we see that his words are false. Judge Jesus, then, by the excellence of his life and teachings? At the very outset we find him an unprincipled impostor and forger of falsehood, or else a weak, insane zealot, who either did not know what he was doing, or was unconscious of what he said.

Had Jesus limited his teachings to those beautiful truths by which he would purify human life and conduct, we may conceive that these, elevated as they were above the moral conditions and appreciation of the people, might gradually through the ages have wrought their way to the world's acceptance. But two important facts we must bear in mind: First, that no long ages intervened between the announcement and the admission of those truths proclaimed by Jesus; and, secondly, Jesus announced many other truths—truths far more difficult to admit than the mere ethics of his kingdom. The question, therefore, which here demands an answer is

not how subsequent ages—men of the nineteenth century, for instance—have embraced that kingdom; neither is the question how those Jews in Jesus' day accepted the sublime *moral system* he proclaimed. It is not at all strange that the more cultivated portions of mankind have to-day, nominally at least, admitted even all that Jesus taught. We have witnessed long centuries of the honor in which he has been held; we have seen his achievements in the power and progress of the nations that have owned his sway; and, besides, here as in other things, we have been under the power of that strange principle in human nature which, after the lapse of time, magnifies great men into heroes, and heroes into demigods. It is natural enough, therefore, that we to-day should revere the name of Jesus; but that men should have honored and worshiped as divine one who at the time was living and teaching among themselves—men who, daily perhaps—certainly very often—heard announcements that stirred to the depths their prejudices and aroused their hate—that these men should have honored

Jesus as they did, is, without the introduction of other influences than those ordinarily operating on the human mind, inexplicable by any principle which either the historian or the logician can assert.

It was enough, in all reason, that those men should have admitted portions of what Jesus taught, even as to the plainest moral duties. Men in those days no more liked to hear "Blessed are the pure in heart," "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the peacemaker, those that mourn, those that bear wrong without retaliation or revenge," than many like to hear these things to-day. To enforce these and other like ideas, however, was comparatively an easy thing. Jesus here had to overcome only the oppositions that arise from human nature. The antagonisms of a perverse religious spirit were not encountered here. Bigotry, intolerance, ecclesiastical vanity, zeal for the letter and tradition had not yet been attacked by Jesus. But the attack soon comes, and never in the history of the world did a people endure what was borne by many of

those Jews to whom Jesus preached. How he assaults their hallowed traditions, castigates their honored teachers and their cherished faiths and practices! Their washing of cups and pots, and their scruples as to eating with unwashed hands, were but substitutions of the commandments of men for the law of God; their punctilious observance of the Sabbath was a superstition; the authority of the elders he habitually set at naught, and even their great legislator, Moses, must in some of his enactments be set aside now that he, Jesus, had appeared; and as for the priests and elders of the people, publicans and harlots should enter the kingdom of heaven before them. The Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, and doctors of the law, authoritative expounders of the truth and righteousness, were but blind leaders of the blind, hypocrites, whited sepulchers, generations of vipers, children of the devil. He alone was the way, the truth, and the life, and no man could come to God but by him.¹ No man could take away his life from him; he alone had power to lay it down, and he had

¹John xiv, 6.

power to take it again.² He was not of this world, like the men to whom he discoursed.³ He had dwelt with God in glory before the foundation of the world,⁴ and after his death and burial he was going to rise from the dead,⁵ and ascend to the throne of the eternal glory.⁶ He was a greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon,⁷ greater than the Temple,⁸ Lord of the Sabbath day,⁹ had existed before Abraham,¹⁰ was one and equal with God,¹¹ and they must honor him, as they had honored their Father, God.¹² Not only so; Jesus would make good these amazing claims by doing deeds which none but God could do. He would heal the leper with a word; he would make the blind to see, the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, and even the dead to rise. These things he had done, and was doing daily, before their eyes,¹³ and if they beheld not those works of God, they were not to admit those lofty claims.¹⁴

² John x, 18.³ John viii, 23.⁴ John xvii, 5.⁵ Matt. xx, 19.⁶ John xvi, 10.⁷ Matt. xii, 4, etc.⁸ Matt. xii, 6.⁹ Mark ii, 28.¹⁰ John viii, 58.¹¹ John x, 30.¹² John v, 23.¹³ Matt. xi, 4.¹⁴ John x, 37

But, strangest thing of all, everything that is here said by Jesus is admitted. That sublime code of ethics, that pure spiritual worship, those extraordinary pretensions to Divine power and wisdom, those extravagant demands of the undivided homage and obedience of mankind, together with his assertions of a pre-existent state and supernatural character, and his claims to have given proof of all this by miracles, and even, in due time, his resurrection from the dead, are admitted, all, without dissent or doubt, by many of those who had every opportunity to test these claims by actual observation.

And this admission was not the zeal and enthusiasm of a moment, nor was it limited to those who had first associated themselves with the cause of Jesus. But a few weeks after the death of Jesus the band of disciples is augmented by three thousand the first time those claims are laid before the people, and shortly afterwards the number is swollen by thousands more, and still the numbers are enlarged. Persecution has little effect upon the rising cause, Stephen is stoned; John and

Peter are put in prison; the disciples are scattered from their homes; high priests and Pharisees essay all means to suppress what before long became known as the "prevailing doctrine;" and, in far less time than Rome had taken to extend her borders a score of miles from the Tiber, are found in almost every capital of the ancient world those who testify their belief in Jesus, and are ready to seal their testimony with their blood.

Now, how can we explain all this? That those strange teachings of Jesus, those wild assertions were admitted without proof of the exalted nature which he professed, is not for one moment to be believed; and that Jesus should have promised and professed the proof, should have professed to do the miracles which he did not do, should have promised even a resurrection from the dead, and then died, was buried, and decayed in the earth like any other man; and yet the disciples not only lost none of their original enthusiasm, but went forth preaching Jesus, his wonderful teachings, his miracles, and resurrection, with a power which allied to itself at the very out-

set thousands of those who, with wicked hands, had slain their Master, and that these in turn should set to proclaiming the new faith by appeal to miracles which had not been wrought, and to the resurrection which had not taken place,—to believe that these disciples should have done all this, is an insult to reason.

It will not do to say that the disciples *believed* the miracles, and that this belief, though a delusion, was sufficient to explain their course. Such a belief, if only a delusion, is as difficult to account for as the fact to be explained. That a few men have, in isolated cases, mistaken for actual facts things which had existed only in their imaginations, especially when for such things their minds had been prepared by previous habits of thought and training, is a fact well known and admitted; but we should search history in vain for large numbers of men in different communities, on different occasions, being so deluded or bewitched as to have visions of things which had no reality; see deeds daily for a number of years performed before their eyes,

deeds offered in proof of claims and teachings that antagonized the rites, creeds, and usages which had controlled their minds and the minds of their fathers for long generations, and many of them persisting in seeing such things with the terrors of persecution, exile, and death confronting them at every step,—such a delusion as this is without parallel in history, is contrary to all we know of human nature, and is more difficult to believe than the miracles themselves, unless we take the position that those men had become insane. We need not speak of delusions here; of ancient prophecies or zeal for Jesus making those men believe, as actually seen by the eye, what had been only the creations of their minds; men who repeatedly see and believe such things have lost their reason, and we need not emphasize the matter by descanting on myths, visions, hallucinations, and other like things. If these men were not insane, there is no explanation of their conduct. That men in full possession of their reason should have admitted those teachings of Jesus—teachings so repellent both to reason and to

prejudice—without evidence given of a mission from the Father, or that this evidence should have been professed by Jesus, but never given to the world, and yet those marvelous pretensions were none the less admitted and maintained—maintained at the greatest sacrifice, and upon the *basis of the proof that was not given*,—that men of sound minds should have acted thus, is equivalent to saying that sane men are insane, or insane men are sane, or that we have no means of distinguishing objective facts from mere mental states.

Should the objector now say that either horn of this dilemma were preferable to admission of things so contrary to nature and experience as were the miracles, it is replied (1) that the miracles could not have been more contrary to nature and experience than such a belief or delusion had been; (2) that contrariety to nature and experience are far different things from inconsistency with the power and will of the Author of nature; and (3) that the phrase *nature and experience* means nothing more nor less than our *experience of nature*, and no man has had enough of

this to say that miracles are contrary to nature or her laws. Each man, it must be remembered, has direct knowledge of his own experience only, and he can know the experience of the rest of the world, therefore, only by the testimony of every other man in the world, and this testimony no man has had. And, then, if testimony to experience against the miracles is to be attended to, it is but fair that we should equally attend to the experience which has been asserted in favor of the miracles. In other words, the new argument of those who deny the miracles reduces the question to one of testimony alone, and hence we come back to the original proposition, that the miracles of Jesus are to be discussed, like all other alleged facts in history, not in the light of the agencies by which they may have been produced, or their relation to law and nature, but wholly in the light of the testimony that has been produced.

Let us now, in conclusion, notice some of the general characteristics of the argument furnished by this testimony.

The argument has been conducted with

reference to the facts alone. It has called for assistance from no hypotheses, theory, or assumption, of any kind. Nothing has been assumed as to the nature of the miracles, nor as to the agencies by which they were accomplished; nothing as to the Divine origin and authority of the sacred writings; nothing as to the character of the witnesses that may not be assumed of men in general; and we have requested assent to no premise or conclusion that would not be readily granted in the investigation of any other subject.

The argument has proceeded upon the principle which runs through all reasonings where we would have the surest basis of belief. When we would have belief to guide us with unerring certainty, we depend upon the testimony of the eye, not of the intellect or judgment. In founding our argument, therefore, upon what the witnesses saw, instead of what either they or we ourselves have believed from a course of reasoning, we have for the miracles of Jesus the very same evidence which controls us in the most positive convictions of our lives—the evidence by which we know

the daily objects and events about us, by which we conduct our intercourse with man and nature, by which we administer our laws, make our researches in physical science, and, in general, fit ourselves into the varied conditions of life and being in the world about us. In a word, our belief in those extraordinary deeds of Jesus rests upon evidence the most satisfactory and convincing known to man, and evidence which has been transmitted to us with a certainty that leaves no doubt as to its having been familiar to the thousands who had every opportunity of knowing whether it was true or false.

The testimony presenting the evidence is both ample and explicit; given without restraint or reservation, without concealment or equivocation, without self-contradiction or mutual contradiction of the witnesses, or contradiction from others, either friends or enemies of the cause in question; the testimony of four different contemporary writers, two of whom are admitted to have been eye-witnesses to at least the general facts of Jesus' life, the other two to have gotten their ac-

counts from those who knew the facts recorded by them; the testimony of multitudes who followed Jesus, including the disciples who, if they knew anything at all of Jesus, certainly knew whether the miracles were performed; numbers of scribes, Pharisees, and other enemies, who were doing all they could to crush the cause of Jesus; and, above all, the testimony of Jesus himself, bearing a character for wisdom and integrity accorded to **no other** man since the world began. The world may be challenged to produce another event in times equally remote, for which we have such evidence. Not one battle, siege, tyrannicide, usurpation, or other fact in all ancient history is so well proven as either the other miracles or the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We go further, and without the least disposition to disparage other portions of the Sacred Word, venture to assert that not in all the history of the chosen people, not in the lives of patriarchs, prophets, or apostles, not even in the life of Jesus himself, have we one other event so well attested, even according to the most exact "historical or literary"

methods, as are the signs, wonders, mighty works, and resurrection from the dead of Jesus.

Evidence such as this can not be refuted. It may be resisted; false methods of investigation, the assumption of unauthorized views of law and nature, may deprive the evidence of its power as addressed to certain minds; but of the evidence itself there can be no refutation. There is not a fact in history, either of ancient or modern times, not a scientific theory, not a case in court, that would not be admitted as fully proven by evidence far less satisfactory. If the miracles of Jesus are not proven by it, human wisdom is incapable of applying a mode of proof that could be more effectual or convincing. A larger number of witnesses could not be demanded; circumstances better adapted to test the honesty of the witnesses could not be secured had we the matter in our own hands to-day; and that such a number of witnesses could have been deluded, could have persisted in their error, and succeeded in deluding multitudes of others into the same wild hallucination with them-

selves, can be admitted only by those wholly ignorant of the laws that govern human nature, or resolutely determined, at every sacrifice of common sense and logic, to form their convictions upon other grounds than evidence.

The rejection of the miracles involves a number of absurdities from which the mind recoils.

Reject the miracles on the ground of want or insufficiency of the evidence, and, to be consistent, we should equally reject the greater part of modern, and all of ancient, history; reject them because of either dishonesty or delusion charged upon the witnesses, and then no testimony can be admitted as that of sane or honest men; reject them because of liability to error in the senses, and we have no absolute assurance as to things occurring within our own observation and experience. All history may thus be shown to be a fable, all life a delusion or a dream.

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